

THE COCKPIT
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

•
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

THE WAR GOD

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

THE NEXT RELIGION

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS.

PLASTER SAINTS

A HIGH COMEDY IN

THREE MOVEMENTS.

THE MELTING POT

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS.

“There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. . . . Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues have they used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. And the way of peace have they not known.”—ST. PAUL: Epistle to the Romans.

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“He who chooses to avenge wrong with hatred is assuredly wretched, but he who strives to conquer hatred with love fights his battle in joy and confidence; he withstands many as easily as one, and has very little need of fortune’s aid. Those whom he vanquishes yield joyfully, not through failure, but through increase in their powers. Hatred, which is completely vanquished by love, passes into love.”—SPINOZA.

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**THE COCKPIT,
BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL
ROMANTIC DRAMA IN THREE ACTS**

**WITH THE AUTHOR'S COMPLIMENTS
TO THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE**

**LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1921**

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TO ALFRED SUTRO

MY DEAR ALFRED,—

Your inspiring criticism and commendation of this play while it was still plastic has suggested to me to dedicate it to our old friendship. That friendship was already well and truly laid before "The Walls of Jericho" rose, and it was cemented by holidays together in Europe ere, caught in the coil of passports, visas and commerce-strangling currencies, the inhabitants of that unhappy Continent had turned into a mutual irritation society. The multiplication of "Sovereign States" has intensified the old plague of Custom Houses, and on the eve of a fresh journey across the Channel, I think with horror of the swarms of able-bodied varlets, waiting, in fancy costumes, at every frontier, to turn me out of my train in the middle of the night in any weather, when they ought to be at work reconstructing the Continent of which we are all citizens.

For what, in effect, does one find even in the heart of "The Cockpit"? Peasant populations toiling from dawn to darkness, the women following the men to the fields, with distaffs on their backs, and their children tugging at their skirts, and all for a crust dipped in soup, a song, a folk-tale, or the smile in a baby's eyes. It is hard to tell one people from another. I have not yet learnt what has happened in Valdania or Bosnavina since I dropped the curtain on these quarrelsome countries, but of one thing I am certain—that their individuals are intermarrying. If the politicians would only leave it alone, "The

Cockpit," linked as never before by railways, telegraphs, cinematographs and aeroplanes, would become of itself "The Melting Pot."

Curiously enough, this pendant to my play on that theme was written near Geneva while the League of Nations was in session—in the Switzerland whose French, German and Italian provinces offer a working model and prophetic emblem of a saner Europe—and it receives its last touches on the eve of the Washington Conference, which provides our war-worn humanity with a fresh spurt of hope. One recalls that it was Abraham Lincoln who said of his countrymen: "We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last great hope of earth."

But I am forgetting that for the reader the curtain has not yet risen. I hasten to efface myself, with the perhaps superfluous assurance that in accepting the dedication of this play, you, dear Alfred, are in no way committed to its vision or analysis of the factors of "The Cockpit."

Believe me in admiration and affection,

Yours sincerely,

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

October, 1921.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ :

NICHOLAS STONE . . .	<i>A New Yorker with a past</i>
OLIVER RANDEL . . .	<i>An American Architect</i>
DUKE D'AZOLLO . . .	<i>Ex-Regent of Valdania</i>
COLONEL THE MARQUIS FIUMA	<i>Governor of the Palace of San Marco</i>
COUNT CAZOTTI . . .	<i>Prime Minister of Valdania</i>
BARON GRIPSTEIN . . .	<i>Financier, afterwards President of the Man-Power Board</i>
GENERAL ROXO . . .	<i>Governor of Scaletta, afterwards War Minister</i>
THE CARDINAL . . .	<i>Head of the Catholics of Valdania</i>
THE PATRIARCH . . .	<i>Head of the Greek Church in Valdania</i>
MARROBIO . . .	<i>A Mahdi, head of the Moslem rebels</i>
CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU . . .	<i>Of the Romenian Cavalry</i>
CORPORAL VANNI . . .	<i>Of the Palace Guards</i>
VITTORIO . . .	<i>A Pacifist Poet</i>
DUCHESS D'AZOLLO . . .	<i>Mistress of the Robes, and Grand Mistress of the Court</i>
COUNTESS CAZOTTI . . .	<i>First Lady of the Bedchamber</i>
NORAH . . .	<i>Nicholas Stone's Irish Servant</i>
PEGGY . . .	<i>Of New York and Scaletta</i>

*Court Officials, Dames and Maids of Honour, Pages,
Choristers, Priests and Guards*

*The action passes in our day. ACT I. at Nicholas Stone's
Sitting-room in New York, ACTS II. and III. in the
Throne Room of the old San Marco Palace at Scaletta, the
capital of Valdania.*

THE COCKPIT

Act One

[*The scene represents a spacious sitting-room in New York on a sunny afternoon in the spring. The room is soberly furnished, but with every sign of ease and refinement. A central table of fine wood. A grand piano littered with music stands by the right wall—right from the actor's point of view, not the spectator's; at L. a desk with a telephone, and a waste-paper basket holding a Sunday paper, etc. A door in the right wall leads to the kitchen regions, a curtained portal to the left towards the upper regions, while the door in the back wall gives access to the entrance hall. As the curtain rises, NORAH, an Irish servant of 45, is ushering in OLIVER RANDEL, a manly young American, who carries a portfolio.*]

NORAH [*Grumpily, in an Irish accent modified by years of America*]

Sit right down ! I'll tell Mr. Stone you're here again.

OLIVER

Oh, I know he's always busy on his books. Miss Stone will do as well.

NORAH [*With sardonic humour*]

Miss Peggy ? You're sure she'll do as well ?

OLIVER [*Enthusiastically*]

Quite !

NORAH
She's out.

OLIVER
Oh ! . . . Where ?

NORAH
On her horse.
[OLIVER *makes an instinctive move doorwards*]
She'd keep you on the run—like a movie. And
Mr. Stone'll keep you waiting, like a dentist.

OLIVER [*Sitting down*]
Oh, I've time to burn. May I look at that paper ?
[*Points to waste-paper basket.*]

NORAH [*Astonished*]
Yesterday's ?

OLIVER
The Sunday paper is like the Sunday roast—it lasts
days.
[NORAH *extracts it*]
Thanks . . . just the one I haven't seen . . . No,
never mind the comic part !

NORAH
Faith, there's nothing heartening in the rest—if half
the headlines is true, I'm sorry I ever came to America !

OLIVER [*Busy turning the pages*]
But think how you'd be oppressed, if you had stopped
in Ireland !

NORAH

I guess if we Irish got top-dog here, we'd oppress America!

[Turns to go upstairs. Her eye catches a comic illustration]

Gee! That's funny!

OLIVER *[Staring eagerly at a picture]*

Ah, here it is!

NORAH

Here what is?

[Turns back.]

OLIVER

Oh, nothing.

• NORAH

Then why didn't you say so? . . .

[Resumes walk to stairs]

You're in luck. There's the master coming down.

You can tell him you're here yourself.

[Moves slowly towards R., her head bent over paper, her face agrin. Enter NICHOLAS STONE, a noble, white-bearded, spectacled veteran, with the scholar's stoop and shabbiness. HE comes peering into his desk at L.]

NICHOLAS *[Surprised, as he perceives the visitor]*

Mr. Randel?

OLIVER

I intrude, I fear. But I'm going West to-morrow.

NICHOLAS

Going West, young man ? Obeying Horace Greeley ?

OLIVER

It's the big new University they're to build——

NICHOLAS

Oh, ah—the how many million dollar University ?
And have you sent in your design yet ?

OLIVER

It's all over. I've won. Out of eighty-three competitors !

NICHOLAS [*Seizes his hand*]

I congratulate you.

OLIVER

My picture was in all the Sunday papers.

NICHOLAS [*Dropping his hand*]

I take back my congratulations.

OLIVER [*Smiling*]

Oh, sir, you may gird at our press—but at least they give an architect as much space as an assassin.

NICHOLAS

Not quite. You've got your hand on a full-page picture of General Roxo.

OLIVER [*Looking at it and reading*]

“Valdania's grand old man.” You are severe.

NICHOLAS

What are all these national heroes but glorified assassins ?

[*As NORAH is going out*]

Coffee, Norah, please.

NORAH [*Gurgling over paper*]

Sure !

[*Exit with heaving shoulders.*]

OLIVER [*Proffering portfolio*]

Would you like to see my design ?

NICHOLAS [*Waving it aside*]

Ah, I know how good American architecture is, and the best out of eighty-three——! If I could only be as sure the University will teach Americanism! People have such a mania for buildings—theatres before they've got plays, opera-houses before they've got music.

OLIVER [*Opening portfolio*]

But that's just what my design expresses—Americanism.

NICHOLAS

Mayflower Americanism ?

OLIVER

Of course ! Note the severe and solemn lines—the old Puritan Americanism which the slums of Europe are swamping.

NICHOLAS [*Waving it away*]

I thought you didn't understand. No man born here can—no man who hasn't suffered from Europe! No, Mr. Randel, that old Puritan America wasn't America.

OLIVER

Not America?

NICHOLAS

No. Only England over again—writ even narrower. America is still being born—born out of the travail of all races. God help the world if she proves an abortion—if she hardens into the same old nationalism as Europe—the same old fetish of the flag.

OLIVER [*Fiercely*]

Fetish?

NICHOLAS [*Laying a fatherly hand on his shoulder*]

Yes, I know you offered your life in the Great War—

OLIVER

Oh, I only flew—it was much safer than the trenches.

NICHOLAS

Tell that to the marines! But anyhow it was for our ideal you adventured, not our flag.

OLIVER

The flag stands for it.

NICHOLAS

Flags have a way of standing only for themselves. In all history there has been only one honest flag—the skull and crossbones !

OLIVER

You are cynical, sir.

NICHOLAS

On the contrary. My faith is so burning that it reduces the toughest shams to tinder.

[*Extends hand*]

I'm afraid I must get back to my book—*The Nemesis of Nationality*. A good title, is it not ?

OLIVER [*Holding out his hand*]

Yes, but——

NICHOLAS [*Dropping his hand*]

You don't think it a good title ?

OLIVER

It's a bully title. But . . . but unless I see Miss Stone to-day I mayn't be able to say good-bye to her.

NICHOLAS

I will convey your adieux.

OLIVER [*Embarrassed*]

I'd rather convey them myself. . . . You see, now that the papers . . .

[*Correcting himself hastily*]

I mean, now that I'm making good, I want—I want to ask—her advice.

NICHOLAS

Little Peggy's advice ! Why, she's wrapped up in her music—she knows nothing of the world ! No, no, my young friend, if you want advice, come to me. You mayn't think it, to see me buried in books, but I've been quite a man of affairs in my time—when you were both in your cradles ! Come, now, what is the trouble ?

OLIVER

You're so busy. I'd rather wait for her.

NICHOLAS

But that's so dull for you. What could you do ? Ah, you could read my MS. !

OLIVER [*Joyously*]

The very thing I wanted !

NICHOLAS [*Beaming*]

Come along, then—I'll put you on the roof-garden.

[*The telephone bell rings*]

Ah, why would Peggy insist on that ? Do get the MS. yourself—you know my study.

[*OLIVER exit L. NICHOLAS goes to telephone*]

Yes, I'm Mr. Stone . . . I can't hear . . . Of course I'm home, but who's speaking ? General Secretary ? General Secretary of what ? *Corpo di Bacco*, they've rung off.

[*Enter NORAH with coffee-tray.*]

NORAH

I'm so glad you've got rid of him.

NICHOLAS

Mr. Randel ? He's waiting upstairs for Miss Peggy.

[*Her tray rattles*]

What's the matter ?

NORAH

Can't you see he's a thief ?—Oh, he won't pinch your books. It's a body-snatcher he is !

NICHOLAS [*Dazed*]

A body-snatcher ?

NORAH

It's Miss Peggy he's after !

NICHOLAS

Eh ? *Nome di Dio*, what would the house be without her ? But no ! no ! He's going West. He only came to say good-bye !

NORAH

The most dangerous word of all ! Get him West before he can put his tongue to it.

[*Puts tray on table.*]

NICHOLAS [*Agitated*]

I'll get rid of him at once. . . .

[*Goes L. Pause*]

But it's a pity to disturb him in the middle of my MS. After all, he can't carry her off this afternoon !

NORAH

He can carry her heart off.

NICHOLAS

Well, but why not ? . . . Some years hence, of course . . . He seems a gifted young—

NORAH

A farmer's son for the likes of her !

NICHOLAS

Ah, but remember, Norah, in her peculiar situation it's not so easy to find a suitable—indeed, perhaps the humbler the young man's origin the better !

NORAH

Sure, you're joking.

NICHOLAS

Not at all. Because—don't you see ?—his folks will make fewer enquiries. They won't go poking into the past, they and their lawyers, demanding pedigrees, birth-certificates, who knows ? We are rich—that will cover everything.

NORAH

I guess you're right. I hadn't thought of the family ferreting out that Miss Peggy is a—

NICHOLAS

Sh !

NORAH

All the same, she can do better than this Mr. Randel. Besides, he's a Protestant ! . . . I'll run up and tell
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him the 'phone message was to say she won't be home till morning.

NICHOLAS [*Smiling*]
What a brilliant liar you are !

NORAH
Sure, it's as easy as truth !
[*Going L.*]

NICHOLAS [*Sighing*]
Ah, truth's not always so easy. . . . You've never breathed a word to her about Valdania ?

NORAH
Faith, I've nigh forgotten the country exists—I almost believe with the darlint she was born in New York !
[*Going towards stairs L.*]
As for the language, divil a word do I remember except *Corpo di Bacco* !

NICHOLAS
Too late, Norah, I hear her latchkey.

NORAH [*Returning*]
That young man has the divil's own luck ! Anyways, don't leave 'em alone, sir. Two's courtship and three's conversation.
[*Exit R. PEGGY in a riding-habit dashes through central door, flushed from her ride, a radiant figure, whose face mirrors with tremulous flashings an eager young soul untarnished by experience.*]

PEGGY [*Leaving door open and rushing to piano-music*]

Where's my "Neapolitan Fantasy" ?

NICHOLAS

What's up ?

PEGGY [*Searching wildly*]

I met Teresa—she wants to take the manuscript to Europe—she sails Saturday.

NICHOLAS

But why can't Teresa travel without your manuscript ?

PEGGY

She's going to show it to a publisher, stupid. There's more chance over there.

NICHOLAS

But *I* offered to publish it—

PEGGY

No, no, it mustn't be paid for—my music must win out of itself. Ah, here it is !

[*Picks up MS. music*]

Heigho ! Teresa set me just *hungering* for Europe !

NICHOLAS

You would leave Daddy ?

PEGGY

I'd take him, too.

NICHOLAS

There's too much globe-trotting, *carissima*. People ought to stay put.

[*Closes door.*]

PEGGY

At that rate, Daddy, you'd be in England.

[*Rolling up MS.*]

NICHOLAS [*Embarrassed*]

Yes, but—— Is that the piece suggesting Naples during an earthquake?

PEGGY

An eruption of Vesuvius?

NICHOLAS

Ah, an eruption. It should be popular with pianists. They love fireworks.

PEGGY

Don't tease.

[*Lays music roll on table*]

What appalling cups!

[*Rings bell by door sharply, then starts taking off her riding-bat. Enter NORAH*]

Why these dreadful enamelled cups?

NORAH

Faith, the master is that fond of toasts, the gentlemen always crack 'em together—they forget it's coffee, not drink. I can't have my best china chipped.

PEGGY

Rubbish ! You give the house too poor an appearance as it is, monopolising the work, scarcely allowing us even a cook.

NORAH [*Bridling*]

I guess I've made Mr. Stone comfortable all these years.

PEGGY

In our position we ought to have a proper staff.

NORAH

I'm not going to have more servants—they'd only make more work for me !

PEGGY

Don't talk to me in that tone !

NICHOLAS [*Upset*]

Peggy !

PEGGY

Take away those cups !

NORAH [*Overawed*]

Yes, miss.

PEGGY [*Stamping foot*]

But you're not doing it !

NORAH

I must get my tray, miss.

[*Exit humbly R.*]

PEGGY [*Smiling*]

You see, Daddy, you let her domineer too much!

NICHOLAS

I see you are your father's daughter!

PEGGY

I like that! Why, you don't even assert yourself.

NICHOLAS [*Confused*]

I—we—I mean I can't assert myself against Norah.
We both owe her too much.

PEGGY

Oh, I know she nursed me and all that. But all the same——

[*NORAH returns with tray and the new china*]

I'm sorry, Norah, I spoke severely.

NORAH

Bless you, Miss Peggy, I like it when you talk like that—it's only natural.

PEGGY

No, it isn't, it's unnatural. Haven't you been almost a mother to me?

NORAH [*Blubbling*]

Don't, Miss Peggy, or I'll be dropping my best china. . . .

[*Goes to table and changes cups*]

Divil take the "Drys." I've been in many God-

forsaken places, but never one where you had a detective down your throat !

[Exit R.]

NICHOLAS [*Laughingly*]

That's another reason for not going to Europe—you said you were hungering for it, but people would think you were thirsting !

PEGGY

Don't pretend to be a Philistine ! You know very well that we Americans have no romance, no art, no music . . .

NICHOLAS

I ought to have known college turns out Europe-snobs ! Parasites on her decaying civilisation. I ought never to have let you learn Italian. You'll end with the gang in Florence who won't go home !

PEGGY

But if America shocks them !

NICHOLAS

A shock is God's message to set what shocks you right.

PEGGY

You can't remedy rawness.

NICHOLAS

More easily than rottenness. I wonder what your idea of a European city is. Naples, I suppose, with Vesuvius in continuous performance.

PEGGY

No, Daddy, my European city snuggles among snow-mountains that play bo-peep with you through the mists. And at their feet the women sing strange sad songs as they strip the vines.

NICHOLAS

What's the matter with California ?

PEGGY [*Not listening, growing more and more rapt*]
And you look up in terror at the giant's castle perched on the crags and the waterfalls hurling themselves down upon you.

NICHOLAS [*Uneasily*]

How about Niagara ?

PEGGY

But in the thirsty summer the giant drinks them up, and you see the mountain-girls coming down to the wells, with their wooden water-kegs strapped on their backs.

NICHOLAS [*More uneasily*]

Eh ?

PEGGY

Such enchanting girls—just like those in Matthew Arnold's poem, you know :

“The red-snooded Phrygian girls
Whom the summer evening sees
Flashing in the dance's whirls
Underneath the starlit trees
In the mountain villages.”

NICHOLAS [*Relieved*]

Ah, it's from Matthew Arnold you got it !

PEGGY

I suppose so. It makes me cry to feel it all so fresh and magical. And the white sails on the lake ! Like giant butterflies poised on the water. And the steep cobbled streets with Madonnas and beggars at every corner. And the sleepy old mosques and bazaars——

NICHOLAS [*Visibly startled again*]

Mosques and Madonnas ! Aren't you mixing things up ?

PEGGY

Now you've blotted out my dream-city ! And it was looking so beautiful ! . . .

[Drops on the music stool, her fingers abstractedly strike out a strange barbaric melody.]

NICHOLAS [*Still more agitated*]

What are you playing ?

PEGGY

Nothing—only a bit of tune that often comes into my head—I must develop it some day. . . . Ah, there's my dream-city again with the band playing it in the Piazza ! What a motley sun-splashed crowd—fezzes, brodered bodices, gold-braided uniforms, gipsy rags, cockades, turbans, cassocks, gaberdines—and all, as the music crashes, turning into one great soul that strains up to the balcony !

NICHOLAS [*Alarmed*]

What balcony?

PEGGY

A side of the Palace gives on to the square—and one great shout goes up to it. *Viva Il Re! Viva Il Re!*

NICHOLAS [*Trying to laugh it off*]

I told you you'd end in Italy!

PEGGY [*Still dazedly*]

Is it Italy?

NICHOLAS

If your dream-mob cheers its King in Italian.

PEGGY [*Smiling at herself*]

I suppose it's because there are so few other Kings left!

NICHOLAS

Fortunately. But you mustn't indulge in day-dreaming.

PEGGY

But it's so lovely floating down on the raft.

NICHOLAS [*Startled again*]

The raft?

PEGGY

Seeing the old-world villages on the banks and——

NICHOLAS,
Don't, Peggy!

PEGGY
One *must* forget Fifth Avenue.

NICHOLAS
Heavens! You've made me forget Mr. Randel. That coffee is for him.

PEGGY
Oliver? . . . Mr. Randel, junior, do you mean?

NICHOLAS
Yes, he's waiting for you—on the roof-garden. Won't you go up to him?

PEGGY
And ~~why~~ can't he come down—for his coffee?

NICHOLAS
Well, bring him down. He's got such interesting news.

PEGGY
The University? I'd already wired my congratulations. There's nothing else?

NICHOLAS
I fancy there is. A much greater subject for congratulation.
[Exit PEGGY L., wondering, smoothing her hair.
NICHOLAS rings agitatedly. NORAH appears.]

NICHOLAS

You said you'd never told Peggy about Valdania.

NORAH [*Indignantly*]

And have I ever even told her what her mother was like? "Look in the glass" is the most she's gotten out of me.

NICHOLAS

But she's just given me an exact description of Scaletta! And played the National Anthem!

NORAH

You don't say! The cute little memory!

NICHOLAS

But she wasn't three.

NORAH

I wasn't two when mammy gave dad a black eye, but I remember every word of the conversation. Says dad——

NICHOLAS

Never mind that now. I've sent her up to Mr. Rañdel, and I hope she'll say "Yes." The sooner Europe is blotted out the better. And she'll go West with him—still further from Europe. The very husband we need!

NORAH

But, Mr. Stone——!

NICHOLAS

Don't let us fly in the face of Providence.

NORAH

Providence ? And him a Protéstant ?

NICHOLAS

And suppose she's the instrument to convert him ?

NORAH

That's so. . . . But if she ain't stuck on him ?

NICHOLAS

She calls him Oliver !

NORAH

If I had married all the men who called me Norah !
Did she hurry up to him when you said he was here ?

NICHOLAS

I'm afraid not.

NORAH

Then she'll have him.

[Wrings her hands]

Oh, acushla ! Acushla !

NICHOLAS

Don't. It's harder on me. . . . Sh ! They're coming
down !

[Motions her kitchenwards.]

NORAH [*Blubbing*]

But the children must be brought up Catholics !

[*Exeunt, SHE R., HE C. Enter L., slowly and alone, OLIVER, vaguely looking for something. HE sees only the Sunday paper with his picture and disgustedly tears it in two.*]

PEGGY [*From stairs*]

Oliver !

OLIVER [*Dropping paper with a joyous cry*]

Peggy !

PEGGY [*Appearing L., coldly*]

You forgot your portfolio.

[*Tenders it.*]

OLIVER [*Frozen*]

Thank you. . . . I was looking for it down here.

PEGGY [*Smiling tremulously*]

Wouldn't do to go West without your design.

OLIVER

Oh, hang my design !

[*Hurls it away.*]

PEGGY

I guess they'll hang *all* the designs.

OLIVER

You're heartless.

PEGGY

Oh, no, Oliver, I do admire your University. And by the time it's ivy-covered—

OLIVER

I shall be grass-covered.

PEGGY

Laurel-covered, you mean. You are going to be famous. I am so glad.

OLIVER

You are spoiling all my success.

PEGGY

Exactly what I should do. We shouldn't get on together, dear Oliver.

OLIVER

Because I haven't come back from the war with your reverence for Europe?

PEGGY

Because I can't feel your reverence for America. I can't sink into this petty American domesticity. Oh, Oliver, can't you understand?

OLIVER

Of course I understand—it is the artist in you. But you could go on composing—I should be only too proud of my little singing-bird.

PEGGY

It isn't only the call of my music.

OLIVER

What else, then ?

PEGGY

I don't know. Something strange, from afar—like a call to service—I can't settle down so—so finally.

OLIVER

But I can wait—years—if only there's an outlook—not a blank window.

PEGGY

That is not fair to you. No, you must go West untrammelled.

OLIVER

That's impossible.

[*Picks up portfolio. Huskily*]
Good-bye, then.

PEGGY

Good-bye.

[*Desperately*]
You'll write to me from the University scaffolding ?

OLIVER [*Eagerly*]

May I ?

PEGGY

Of course.

[Holds out hand]

Aren't you going to shake hands ?

OLIVER *[Throwing down portfolio to take her hand in both of his]*

Oh, Peggy, then you do care a little ?

PEGGY

You never asked me that. You only wanted to absorb me.

OLIVER

You darling !

[Their lips meet.]

PEGGY

How wonderful you are ! . . . It almost seems as if the rest were irrelevant—even music.

OLIVER

And I thought I was happy when I won the competition !

PEGGY

I have never even thought I was happy.

OLIVER

Never happy ! You ?

PEGGY

My mother died when I was a baby, and father has always been so busy prophesying.

OLIVER

My poor little girl ! I must make up to her for everything.

PEGGY

Yes, for everything.

[SHE opens her arms to him]

Oh, Oliver, if I should lose you now !

OLIVER

Why should we lose each other ? I will speak to your father at once.

PEGGY

No, no—it is all too sacred !

OLIVER

But, dearest, I leave New York to-morrow.

PEGGY *[Clinging to him]*

So soon. Oh !

[NICHOLAS heard deliberately humming in the doorway.]

OLIVER

Ah, here he comes !

[SHE retreats]

Don't run away !

PEGGY

I can't face even Daddy, yet. . . . Besides, I must change my riding-skirt. *A rivederla, carissimo.*

[*Kisses her hands to him and runs off L. Enter NICHOLAS with elaborate unconcern.*]

NICHOLAS

Well, young man. And how far did you get ?

OLIVER [*Surprised*]

Eh ?

[*Ecstatically*]

Oh, sir, Peggy——

NICHOLAS

Peggy ? Didn't you read *any* of my MS. ?

OLIVER [*Embarrassed*]

Oh, that ! I—you see, Peggy came up—and we—we want to marry.

NICHOLAS

What !

OLIVER

I hope you're not angry.

NICHOLAS

I can't say I'm delighted to be robbed of her.

OLIVER

Then you consent ?

NICHOLAS

You go as fast as your aeroplane. Sit down, sit down, young man, and let us talk.

[THEY sit]

You realise that there are great differences between you ?

OLIVER

Naturally. Peggy is an angel.

NICHOLAS

That of course. But I had in mind such things as religion——

OLIVER

After you've come back from the war, you don't take much stock in religion—religious differences, I mean.

NICHOLAS [*Drily*]

Yes, religion does usually mean that. But there's race too. Peggy's not American.

OLIVER

Gee ! Is there any race that's not American ? But I knew you were English-born. That's no difference.

NICHOLAS

But we're not English. Moreover—I meant to carry the secret to my grave, but it is borne in on me as I speak to you that I ought to tell you this much—Peggy is not my daughter.

OLIVER.

Not your—— ? But she calls you daddy !

NICHOLAS

She doesn't know. And she must never know.

OLIVER [*After a pause*]

I will keep your secret.

NICHOLAS

It doesn't mean that she won't inherit my wealth.

OLIVER

Oh, sir, I'm not worrying about that.

NICHOLAS

You mean you are worrying about her birth ?

OLIVER

No, no. I thank God she was born at all. Why, even if she were nobody's daughter—— !

NICHOLAS

Would she were ! But she's somebody's daughter. That's the trouble.

OLIVER

Her father may claim her ?

NICHOLAS

Not he—he's safely dead. Still, I can only consent to the marriage on one condition.

OLIVER

I accept.

NICHOLAS

But listen ! You must take Peggy out West with you.

OLIVER

What ! To-morrow ?

NICHOLAS

Of course not, but as soon as possible.

OLIVER

Say, I told you I wasn't kicking. I guess I'd best put off my trip till she can come along.

NICHOLAS

Good. And you must always live in America.

OLIVER [*Disconcerted*]

Oh ! Never go to Europe, you mean ? But Peggy—— !

NICHOLAS

Yes, I know. I've been trying to explain to her that we've got to stay here and make God's own country a fit place for God to live in. But it'll be all right if you keep away from the Balkan parts of Europe—not that Europe isn't all Balkans nowadays, a pit of steel-spurred cocks, each crowing on its own little dunghill. God ! to think of all those millions of peaceful citizens turned into murderers as quails in Turkestan are turned into fighting-cocks by tobacco smoke,

OLIVER

You can't do away with war.

NICHOLAS

So the British once thought about cockfighting. Henry VIII. made it a national institution and cock-pits grew almost as thick as cinemas to-day. At Shrovetide schoolchildren had to pay the masters cock-penny for a cock to pit against another school cock. But now if you want to pit the main openly, you must go to the Philippines.

OLIVER

Do I gather Peggy was born in the Balkans ?

NICHOLAS [*Hesitating*]

Ahem ! There or thereabouts. A mongrel State, Arabized Italian by lingo, with Catholics, Greek-Orthodox and Moslems always fighting one another or their neighbours. In the Second Crusade they all fought on the Moslem side under the Sultan of Ikonion, for it wasn't until the Armenians began assassinating them that any accepted Christianity. In fact, the Moslems are still the most numerous element, though the Christians combine to keep them under. Some twenty years ago a sanguine Chancellor arose who tried to modernise his people. But they murdered the Queen and blew up the Chancellery.

OLIVER

Sounds worse than Mexico.

NICHOLAS

A home for incurables. The Catholics ruled the roost, but if ever the Orthodox got top-dog they hanged Catholics and Jews. But the Catholics always got their own back and hanged Orthodox and Jews. Sometimes, of course, both had to combine and then the lamp-posts held Moslems and Jews! The only thing the three religions had in common except Jew-baiting was the hatred of a neighbour State, which a century ago had annexed a barren mountain-province, and their real God was their fifth-century filibuster, Alpaström, whom they all expected to rise one day from his grave in Rome and win back the lost province.

OLIVER [*Smiling*]

Talk of Rip Van Winkle!

NICHOLAS

These lunatics took it seriously; there's a national proverb:

"When Rome yields up our royal seed,
Bosnavina to death shall bleed."

[*Starting up*]

Oh, but I didn't mean to give away names. I'm a forgetful old fool. And that coffee, too! Must be iced by now. Never mind. Let's drink confusion to the cockpit.

[*Goes to table and pours coffee for OLIVER.*]

OLIVER

I'd rather drink to Peggy's present country.

[*Takes cup.*]

NICHOLAS

Same thing.

[Pours for himself]

It's the Melting Pot versus the Cockpit.

[Holds up cup]

To America !

OLIVER

To America !

[THEY clink cups. An unusually imperious rat-tat-tat. THEY pause in their drinking.]

NICHOLAS

Who can that be ?

[NORAH appears door C. with a frightened face.]

NORAH

It's soldiers !

NICHOLAS

Soldiers !

NORAH

Two autos-full. And General Roxo—him that used to be Captain Roxo.

NICHOLAS *[Alarmed]*

He recognised you ?

NORAH

No, I recognised him.

NICHOLAS

Tell him I'm engaged—I can see nobody.

OLIVER

But I can make myself scarce.

NICHOLAS

Nonsense! Drink your coffee. Leave us, Norah.

NORAH

Si, Signor—Mr. Stone.

[*Exit* NORAH.]

NICHOLAS [*Sipping his coffee*]

Strange how Europe will keep breaking in!

OLIVER

Is it that Valdanian headliner?

NICHOLAS

Yes, the fire-eater our fool-press has been booming.

[*Re-enter* NORAH.]

NORAH

The General's Secretary complains he 'phoned you and you said you'd be home.

NICHOLAS

Ah! I thought he said *general* secretary. Tell him I was cut off—I'm sorry, but I've business with a friend.

OLIVER

But, Mr. Stone, if I'm to cancel my journey to-morrow

I must get busy too. Let me do my wiring while you work off your visitors. May I leave my portfolio?

[Without waiting for a reply HE opens the door, revealing in the hall-way a group of officers in peaked caps, cloaks and swords, headed by GENERAL ROXO, a one-armed veteran, glittering under a loose cloak with stars and medals, and his secretary, the MARQUIS FIUMA, a handsome man in the thirties, carrying a wallet of papers. OLIVER bows to them as he passes, and ROXO seizes the opportunity to advance.]

ROXO

Pardon my persistence, Mr. Stone, we had meant to wait upon you later in the week, but in the midst of an official reception at our legation, a cable reached me necessitating instant arrangements for returning to Valdania by this afternoon's boat. Our only chance was to take you on our way back to the hotel. And I feel sure that as a good patriot——

NICHOLAS

So good a patriot, General——er——

ROXO

Roxo.

NICHOLAS

Roxo, that you find me toasting America.

ROXO

Ah, I thought from your name you'd been naturalised.

NICHOLAS
Fifteen years ago.

ROXO [*Advancing*]
Fifteen centuries cannot extinguish the flame of the
fatherland. Even Valdanians born in the States——

NICHOLAS [*Coldly*]
May I ask you to come at once to the point of your
visit ?

ROXO
The Marquis Fiuma can put it more briefly.
[*The MARQUIS bows and NICHOLAS bows back. The
SUITE drifts in behind the MARQUIS. But NICHOLAS,
standing as on guard, does not invite anybody to sit
down. FIUMA lays down his wallet.*]

FIUMA
As you doubtless know, Mr. Stone, the death of Tito
the Fifth two years ago left us without an heir to the
throne, and Polish and Bolshevist adventurers profited
by the consequent anarchy to overrun Valdania.
Thanks to our heroic General Roxo,

[*The GENERAL makes a deprecatory gesture*]
all were beaten off, and Valdania took advantage of
the war-unity to turn herself into a constitutional
country, clipping the wings of my class

[*Smiling*]
and replacing the Chancellor and the Council by a
Parliament,

NICHOLAS

Really? I have not followed your politics. Our papers gave you no space till his Excellency arrived. So, General, you have made Valdania safe for democracy!

FIUMA

Not so safe as *money* could make it. We are in woeful need of the sinews of . . . peace. And the Government naturally thought that a mission—headed by our national hero—to our enriched *émigrés*—

NICHOLAS [*Coldly*]

Yes, I know America is the milch-cow of Europe. But why come to me?

FIUMA

Seven years ago, we are told, you subscribed fifty thousand dollars to our famine fund.

NICHOLAS

Only what other Americans did. To feed famished foreigners is one thing—to interfere in their politics another. My blood is English.

[*Rings.*]

ROXO

I am sorry. I am very sorry. We thought you were a Valdanian. This is truly an intrusion. My love for Valdania must be my excuse. . . .

[*To NORAH, who has answered the ring, from door C., where she has been waiting*]

Haven't I seen your face before?

NORAH

Sure, you haven't seen it behind.

ROXO

Come, *amici*, we shall have a little longer for packing.
God keep you, sir.

NICHOLAS

Thank you! A pleasant journey!

[*With a sudden impulse*]

But why should I stoop to mislead you? Only my mother was English, my father *was* a Valdanian.

GAG AND SUITE

Hi!

[*THEY turn back.*]

NICHOLAS

My interest in Valdania has long been submerged
in a big *idea*.

There is nothing bigger than Valdania.

FIUMA AND SUITE

Bravo!

ROXO

And she will not be denied, you see, my brother.

NICHOLAS

She must be denied, she shall be denied. I am less brother to you than to the young American who has just left me. What is this mysterious tyranny of race, and birth? It is true I am a son of Valdania. But I have left her behind me as a barbarian camp.

FIUMA [*Half drawing sword*]
Signor!

NICHOLAS

You came for dollars, you shall have truths. My mother's English property has enabled me to help many causes. But for Valdania not a cent.

[*Angry murmurs.*]

ROXO

You would forsake your own flesh and blood!"

NICHOLAS

You speak of my flesh and blood, I speak of my soul. In the Middle Ages every human soul was considered so important that God and Devil were at wrestle for it. To-day we are treated as mere dogs of a pack. But I am man, not animal, and I assert my spiritual freedom.

FIUMA

And are you not free to help Valdania?

NICHOLAS

Ah, if you had come to me with a petition. But you come with a claim, a demand. Valdania is no more to me than the rest of the cockpit you call Europe. Does she need food? I will help her again.

ROXO.

Thank you—the hand I lost for my country is not held out for *alms*. Valdania calls on her sons to safeguard her renaissance. The Moslem extremists, unconciliated by the Constitution, still demand dominance, and under their rebel Mahdi, Marrobio—

NICHOLAS

Ah, then it is not all such plain sailing. And I don't suppose even your Catholics and Greek-Orthodox have quite buried the hatchet. And you come to ask America to finance your petty wrangles!

ROXO*

No, to end them by strengthening the new Government. Otherwise Bosnavina, to say nothing of Italy or Greece, may seize the opportunity to absorb us. Had there been an heir to the throne, the whole people, weary of slaughter, would have rallied round the crown. But alas! with every scion of our royal house scrupulously assassinated—

NICHOLAS

And it is into this welter of blood you ask me to dip my hands! No, General, better for humanity if Italy or Greece does swallow you up—or even Bosnavina!

ROXO

Signor Stone !

FIUMA

Traitor !

SUITE

Tradittore !

[The swords of the SUITE flash out.]

NICHOLAS

I am an American—and if you wish to get home unelectrocuted——

ROXO

Put up your swords, Signori. Remember this man's blood is not wholly Valdanian.

FIUMA

God be thanked !

[HE and the others sheathe their swords.]

ROXO

Ay, and may He forgive you, Signor, the wrong you do your father's memory. Why, when Poland menaced our freedom, your docks here in New York were blocked by Valdanians struggling to board the boats and die for the fatherland. Thousands were prosperous—they had wives and families—but little Valdania called, and her sons answered "Here !"

NICHOLAS

As I answer—"Here !" Here is my duty—to America. To help Valdania would be to roll the world backward.

ROXO

A pretty excuse for disloyalty and meanness. Come, *amici!* Ah, Signor Stone, in our little Valdanian hospital in Brooklyn, a paralysed old pauper of eighty, when he heard who I was, *sat up*, and crying "*Viva* Valdania," lifted his poor withered hand that I might pull off his silver ring—his one little treasure—for the holy cause. You may imagine if I kissed him on both cheeks and if we wept together. *Addio*, Signor. You set me pining more than ever for the Piazza da Pietra.

NICHOLAS

The Piazza da Pietra ?

ROXO

Ah, I suppose you knew it as the Piazza Grande. But we have re-named it in honour of our great murdered Chancellor.

NICHOLAS

In honour of—ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

ROXO

Signor ! I will not hear our immortal martyr laughed at.

NICHOLAS

Like Figaro, I hasten to laugh lest I should weep. Ah, General, if only you had thought me such a great Chancellor when I was alive !

ROXO

E

NICHOLAS

I am the immortal Da Pietra.

[*Sensation.*]

ROXO

You Niccolò da Pietra ! The jest is ill-timed.

NICHOLAS

It would be, if you hadn't to catch your boat. Good-bye !

ROXO

Is it possible ?

NICHOLAS

Pietra only means Stone !

ROXO

Then you were not blown to pieces and burnt with the Chancellery ?

NICHOLAS

To the best of my belief.

ROXO

But—but I attended your funeral service.

NICHOLAS

I read of it with pleasure.

ROXO

Then—then you sneaked off to America, you ! leaving us to struggle alone these twenty years !

NICHOLAS

And had I not reason? As I told you just now, I have not followed your struggles—I had wider horizons. But when I struggled to give Valdania the Constitution you now say has been achieved, did you not fight against me as desperately, if not as dishonestly, as the Cazotti journal?

ROXO

I thought you meant to question the King's divine right.

NICHOLAS

Tito himself understood me better. Despite his abominable cruelty to the young Queen, he had the intelligence to perceive that if our internal chaos continued, Bosnavina would bite off another province.

ROXO.

It is what I have since learned to understand.

NICHOLAS

Ha! By granting equal rights even to the Moslem, I aimed to create a common Valdanian citizenship. By safeguarding the Jews, I encouraged the upbuilding of our industries. I won over King Tito to constitutionalism. The country began to take its place in the new Europe. You know my reward. I could have forgiven the reactionaries their attempt to murder me. But that, they should have murdered the young Queen——!

KOXO

They said it was through her that you had won over the King.

NICHOLAS

Yes, I know, and that I was her lover.

ROXO

Were you not ?

NICHOLAS

The Queen was as pure as our mountain snows. I had an immense pity for her in her cold, high loneliness. Poor Margherita ! If ever sovereign wore a crown of thorns——

ROXO

Then why did you not remain to revenge her ?

NICHOLAS

Revenge ? The righteousness of fools. The eternal whirligig of blood. No, I preferred to shed only ink—to return to my early love, literature.

[Goes to desk, takes cheque-book]

But I have liberated my mind at the expense of your precious time. You *shall* have a cheque after all. It was worth it.

ROXO

No, Da Pietra. . . . Not your money now. It is *you* we want.

NICHOLAS

Me ?

ROXO

Come back with us !

[Excited murmurs of approval among the SUITE.]

NICHOLAS

Back ? With the sentiments you have just heard ?

ROXO •

Your head spoke but not your heart. What is America to you or you to America ? It is a childish people with its mouth always full of candies and sweet sentiments. Come, Niccolò da Pietra. We will build up the great Valdania of your early dream. Sail with us !

FIUMA AND SUITE

Bravo !

ROXO

You see ! The news will spread like wild-fire. It will be a trumpet-call.

NICHOLAS

General Roxo, the trumpet of Resurrection Day could not blow me back to Valdania !

ROXO

Then you will let Cazotti rule ?

NICHOLAS

Cazotti ?

ROXO

You did not know Cazotti was Prime Minister ?

NICHOLAS

Cazotti ? Not the blackguardly journalist who fought against all my reforms ?

ROXO

The same. He has now carried them all.

NICHOLAS

But it was his journal that provoked my assassination !

ROXO

I shouldn't be surprised if he threw the bombs.

FIUMA

You are imprudent, my General. Cazotti has his spies everywhere. Forget this, Signori.

NICHOLAS

I can believe anything of Cazotti. And you Catholics work under this upstart Greek Church'adventurer !

ROXO

For Valdania's sake.

FIUMA

He is indispensable. With his own newspapers, his own cinemas, with a millionaire Jew, Baron Gripstein, to back him, with the bulk of the Moslems won over by equal suffrage, with his own Greek Church party solidly behind him, we Catholics had only the choice of joining his coalition or being swamped.

ROXO

But the Premiership is not enough for him. What he covets is the crown.

NICHOLAS

Nonsense ! A pretty Napoleon !

ROXO

There is no nonsense about it. It is the cable warning me of it that drives me home. Since King Tito's death we have made shift with a Regent.

NICHOLAS

Who ?

ROXO

The Duke d'Azollo.

NICHOLAS

That profligate dilettante, divided between his old masters and his young mistresses ?

ROXO

Precisely. A mere warming-pan for Cazotti. You see, to get a suitable Prince is not easy.

NICHOLAS [*Smiling grimly*]

No, indeed, with the German factory under a ban !

ROXO

And if we took a Prince from a neighbour State we should come hopelessly under its influence. As for the northern Powers, none sees any prestige in associ-

tion with our bankrupt finances, and the few possible Princes shrink from repeating the fate of the Queen.

NICHOLAS

I don't wonder.

ROXO

Moreover, by the Constitution our sovereign must be Catholic—we are still the ruling sect, you see.

NICHOLAS

Then that rules out Cazotti !

ROXO

No, alas ! Cazotti will 'vert !

NICHOLAS

Ha ! ha ! ha !

ROXO

It is no laughing matter. In the difficulty of finding a Prince, Cazotti's papers and cinemas will propose and picture Cazotti, then Parliament will offer him the crown. Twice he will refuse, but the third time—ah, Niccolò da Pietra, if only in the assassination of the Queen, the infant had been spared ! There would have been to-day a native sovereign for the nation to rally round——

NICHOLAS [*With sudden harshness*]

Let Cazotti be rallied round and murdered ! I'm afraid I mustn't keep you any longer.

[*Holds out hand.*]

ROXO [*Not taking it*]

Then you persist in your living death!

FIUMA

You will let Cazotti king it—the jackal roaring while the lion blinks!

NICHOLAS [*Using his rejected hand to pick up FIUMA's wallet*]

Your papers!

ROXO

Come, Signori. Valdania shall hear of this recreant Yankee—his name shall stink in history.

NICHOLAS

It will be better policy, General, to keep it in good odour.

ROXO [*Turning*]

No! By the tombs of our fathers which you have deserted——

NICHOLAS

But I haven't—I'm lying in one of them. Bombed, incinerated, pedestalled on your Piazza, I'm a bigger national asset to you dead than alive. Think it over on the boat.

[*Enter PEGGY unmarked L., in her changed toilette.*]

ROXO [*Drawing sword with his left hand*]

And if I ensured our national asset——!

PEGGY [*Alarmed*]

Daddy !

[All turn towards the new-comer. ROXO's sword droops and slides into its scabbard, then his body droops, and he falls on one knee, as if hypnotised.]

ROXO [*In a dazed awed whisper*]

The Queen !

NICHOLAS

Are you mad, General ?

ROXO [*Unheeding*]

She alive too !

[With a sob]

O God of Valdania !

NICHOLAS

But this is my daughter ! My daughter, Peggy !

ROXO [*Rising slowly, passing his hand across his forehead*]

Your daughter ? And yet you say you were not the Queen's—— !

NICHOLAS

Silence ! Not before the child. Go back to your room, Peggy. These men are crazy specimens from the cockpit you hanker after ! Why don't you go ?

PEGGY

Ah !

[Rushes to the telephone.]

ROXO

Yes, ring up the police! And they shall arrest the gentleman you call father as a kidnapper.

NICHOLAS

What are you talking about?

ROXO

None of your innocence. I see it all now, Fiuma. The little Princess was no more blown up than he was. He took advantage of the wreck of the Palace to steal the nation's hope.

FIUMA	}	Traitor!
& SUITE		<i>Tradittore!</i>

ROXO

But the God of Valdania has not forgotten us. He has saved our royal seed for this fateful hour. It is our Queen, *amici*, our dear Margherita!

FIUMA AND SUITE [*Saluting her with flashing
swords*]
Viva la Regina! Viva Margherita!
[PEGGY stands dazed, looking from them to her
father.]

ROXO

Ah, Your Majesty, this is a great day for Valdania!

PEGGY.

Valdania? Where exactly is Valdania?

NICHOLAS

Valdania, my child, is the very heart of the cockpit I rescued you from, and to which these race-bigots would drag you back.

PEGGY

By what right ?

ROXO

By divine right, Madam. Are you not our Queen ?

PEGGY

I their Queen, Daddy ?

NICHOLAS

In a way, I suppose.

PEGGY

A Queen ? I ?

NICHOLAS

Alas !

PEGGY

I don't understand.

NICHOLAS

You are the last scion of the royal house of Valdania.

PEGGY

But then, Daddy, you must be King, not a Queen.

NICHOLAS

No, Peggy. I love you—I have watched over you—
as a father. But that is all my claim——

PEGGY

You are not my father ? Oh, this is some dream . . .
But here is my music . . . Here are the cups I scolded
Norah about . . . here is Oliver's portfolio . . .

ROXO

It is no dream, Your Majesty. . . . To revenge himself
on Valdania, this man has stolen and hidden you . . .

NICHOLAS

My child will not believe that.

PEGGY [*Fretfully*]

But what *am* I to believe, Daddy ? Why did—— ?

NICHOLAS

I will explain to you, *carissima*, when these gentlemen
are gone.

ROXO

Gone ? Do you suppose we will go without our
Queen ?

NICHOLAS

Since you have gone without her so long !

FIUMA

Be serious, Signor. We demand our Queen, and this
very instant,

NICHOLAS

I am sorry. She remains here—under the American flag!

ROXO

She goes with us—under the Valdanian flag.

NICHOLAS

But I am naturalised.

ROXO

What of it ? She is not your daughter.

NICHOLAS [*Staggering*]

My God ! . . . All the same she is no criminal.

FIUMA

Criminal ? Her Majesty ?

NICHOLAS

Then you cannot extradite her.

ALL THE OTHERS [*Taken aback*]

Ah !

NICHOLAS [*Pursuing his advantage*]

And she is of age, thank God. You can't take her against her will.

ROXO

And do you suppose you could keep her against ours ?
That any place on earth would be safe from our loyal

devotion ? Happily, we know her royal will. Our Sovereigns have never yet abandoned their people. And never did Valdania need a Sovereign so urgently.

PEGGY

The country needs me, you say ?

ROXO

As it needs rain in drought and sun in winter. You alone can give it unity and happiness.

PEGGY

Is it so wretched, then ?

ROXO

Madam, it is a beautiful country—our snowpeaks, our vineyards—

PEGGY

Ah, and the blue lake ! Oh, Daddy, and you pretended it was all my fancy. . . . But it is a Paradise.

ROXO

Disunity has made it an Inferno. But when Your Majesty comes back—— !

NICHOLAS

Into that lunatic asylum ? Never !

PEGGY

But, Daddy, if the patients need my—— ?

NICHOLAS

You do not understand !

ROXO

Silence, Signor da Pietra ! How dare you interrupt Her Majesty ?

FIUMA [*Raising sword*]

Insolente !

PEGGY [*Pitifully*]

Signor da Pietra ? Are you not even Nicholas Stone ? Oh, why are you so wrapped up in mysteries ? Why all this falsehood ?

NICHOLAS

I could bite my tongue out for telling the truth. What devil drove you here, Roxo, to tempt me into it ?

PEGGY

But what *is* the truth ? Who are you ? . . . Why don't you explain ?

NICHOLAS

If, after all these years, Peggy, you cannot trust me—— !

PEGGY

How can I trust you when you have torn me blind-folded from my own world—when you have let grow up in me—ah, but I knew inwardly I was called away from happiness !

[*Covers her eyes.*]

NICHOLAS

God ! Why is life so complex ? Believe me, *carissima*, I meant it all for the best.

PEGGY

But you took me from my country, my people, my duty !

ROXO

And your throne, Madam.

PEGGY [*Ignoring him*]

And my mother ! How often I asked you about her, but you turned the question aside, so that I feared to ask it, I grew afraid she was a bad woman, of whom not even Norah would speak. And the gentle voice I remembered, the soft wet cheek pressed to mine, they were the Madonna's, I thought, pitying the lonely little girl. Ah, how often I cried in the night. All the other girls had mothers—and I—even the memory of one was denied.

[*Sobs.*]

NICHOLAS

Oh, Peggy ; if only I had realised ! But I suppose a man can't . . . Don't cry, *carissima*. Your mother was a Madonna. And in the land you remember as a Paradise, they murdered her.

PEGGY

Oh, my poor mother ! My poor mother !

NICHOLAS

You see how knowledge hurts. I saved you that suffering at least.

PEGGY

Ah no ! This is a beautiful suffering.

[Comes closer]

Oh, Daddy, and it was to save me you took me away ?

NICHOLAS

Ah, you have understood. I knew you would ! It was Norah that brought you to me by the subway to the Chancellery—when the left wing of the Palace blew up. There was a fashion for English-speaking nurses, and Norah had been chosen as a Catholic. I was Chancellor then, and I felt my house was no safe place for you ; but I had hardly gone out with you and Norah when the Chancellery blew up too, with all the witnesses of your visit. It was really you that saved me, rather than the reverse.

PEGGY

I'm so glad, Daddy. I'm so glad.

NICHOLAS

For days, while the reactionaries held Scaletta, we lay hid in a mountain cave, you and I, while Norah, being unknown to the crowd, went foraging for us—fortunately there was plenty of money in my pocket, and she being so pretty—

PEGGY

Norah pretty ?

NICHOLAS

Ah, it was more than twenty years ago. Anyhow, she managed everybody and everything, even got passages first in a gipsy-caravan, then on a timber-raft——

PEGGY

Ah, the raft !

NICHOLAS

We drifted with the timber-men to Bosnavina, thence got by way of Rolmenia to Genoa, where, finding an emigrant ship, I thought it simplest to wait in New York till Valdania settled down. Travelling as Mr. Stone, the English widower, with his orphaned daughter and her Irish nurse——

ROXO

I thought I recognised her.

PEGGY [*Stamping her foot*]

You are not to interrupt—nobody must interrupt.

[*Roxo withers.*]

NICHOLAS

When I got on board I was breathing fire and revenge—oh, my sentiments would have delighted General Roxo. I meant to come back, to counterplot—but that fortnight on the Atlantic——

• ROXO [*Exhibiting a wrist-watch*]

We shall lose the boat—I beg Your Majesty's pardon !

NICHOLAS

But that fortnight on the Atlantic—the first breathing-space in my political career—the nights on the lonely sea under the silent stars—oh, it was like a religious revelation ! Why go back—why drag you back to that cockpit of races and religions—— ?

PEGGY

Yes, Daddy, yes.

[*SHE holds out her hands to him.*]

NICHOLAS [*Taking them*]

You see, General, she chooses Columbia.

ROXO [*Solemnly*]

Her Majesty has no choice—she is chosen.

PEGGY

By whom ?

ROXO

By God. Madam, if this man has left you a Catholic——

NICHOLAS [*Hotly*]

Do you suppose I would turn her from her mother's religion ?

ROXO

And do you suppose her mother would have had her abandon her duty ?

[*PEGGY winces. Her hands drop from NICHOLAS'S.*]

NICHOLAS

Duty to what ? To a "hornets' nest, to a den of cockatrices, to a kingdom where she must cross the ambitions of a desperado, who combines the modern democrat with the mediæval *condottiere* ?

PEGGY,

Is it the danger, Daddy, that you fear for me ?

NICHOLAS

Not merely the danger. But they are deceiving you—you can bring the country no peace—the country will only rob you of yours—you will have terrible shocks.

PEGGY

Didn't you say a shock is God's way of telling us to put our country straight ?

NICHOLAS

But you can't straighten a shambles. Shall you be murdered too ?

PEGGY

If it is God's will—— ! Have I the right to shrink from the task ?

ROXO

The royal blood has spoken.

FIUMA AND SUITE

Brava ! Bravissima !

NICHOLAS

You would leave me, Peggy?

PEGGY

Of course not, we will go together.

NICHOLAS

Impossible! You don't understand the etiquette of a Court. It would no longer be the old relation. I couldn't sit without your command, or dine side by side with you. I should have to bow and smirk, call you Majesty, never contradict you——

PEGGY

Oh, no!

NICHOLAS

Oh, yes!

[*Growls from FIUMA and the SUITE*]

You hear! But it must not be, Peggy. You have wealth, beauty, youth—a brave young lover.

[*PEGGY winces again*]

What more can you ask of God?

PEGGY [*Slowly struggling with herself*]

Is it not what God asks of us?

NICHOLAS

O spare her, General, for her mother's sake! Have pity.

ROXO

There is no place for pity in high politics. But why speak of pity? She will have the throne, the homage of millions. The eyes of Europe will be——

NICHOLAS

But she is so young! Ah, let me go in her stead.

ROXO

You? Nicholas? First! Ha! ha! ha!

NICHOLAS

You know what I mean—I can crush Cazotti, conciliate Marrobbio, unify Valdania. It is what you just asked.

ROXO

I did not know then we had a bigger card to play—the Queen. We can't accept a substitute.

NICHOLAS

Then I must go *with* her?

ROXO

And lessen her prestige? No, no, we can afford no rival sensation. Her Majesty must arrive alone.

PEGGY [*Pitifully*]

Alone?

NICHOLAS

Alone? Do you suppose I would let her go without me?

ROXO

Where would you get a passport from ?

NICHOLAS

From Washington, of course.

ROXO

And do you suppose our Consul would *viser* it ?

PEGGY

I will viser it.

ROXO [*Bowing*]

Your Majesty's prerogatives do not override the law of Valdania—and that forbids entry to criminal aliens.

NICHOLAS

Criminal alien ? I ?

ROXO

And is a kidnapper not a criminal, or an American not an alien ?

NICHOLAS

I will appeal to the American Government.

ROXO

You ? Who are naturalised under a false name ?
Ha ! ha ! ha ! . . . Madam !

[*Bows*]

Excuse my left arm.

PEGGY [*Not taking it*]

I can't go without my—without Signor da Pietra.

ROXO

Your Majesty heard the State reason that makes his resurrection impossible——

FIUMA [*Catching PEGGY's shrinking eye*]

For the moment, at least.

PEGGY [*Relieved, with grateful look to FIUMA*]

Ah, for the moment.

NICHOLAS

You expect me to surrender a girl to a band of soldiery ?

ROXO

Is a strange man's house a proper place for her ?

[NICHOLAS winces]

My wife, Your Majesty, is waiting in a car below. You shall appoint her Dame of Honour. It will be the first expression of your royal will. Ah, Signor da Pietra, you know the game is up. You know you cannot keep a Sovereign from her State ! Madam !

[*Offers arm again.*]

PEGGY [*Pitifully*]

I—I must decide at once ?

ROXO [*Extending his wrist-watch*]

Boats do not wait.

PEGGY [*Wildly*]

But my trunks—my manuscripts——!

ROXO

Can come by the next boat—with Signorina Salvador.

[*Turning to one of the suite*]

Captain Salvador, your sister must remain behind.
We shall need her cabin and passport.

[*The CAPTAIN bows*]

She will provide the little Your Majesty will need for
the voyage—for, of course, you must remain in your
cabin.

PEGGY [*Dazedly*]

But—but—I have no Court gowns.

ROXO

I will cable the Duchess D'Azello to meet us in Paris.
She will make an excellent Mistress of the Robes.

PEGGY

But it is all so sudden.

ROXO

History is sudden. Suppose Cazotti proclaims himself
King? What a work to undo it!

PEGGY

But Teresa—my friends—I must say good-bye——

ROXO

No, no, they would spread the news before we've
settled our story.

PEGGY

Settled your story ?

ROXO

We can't expose your kidnapper—un-name his Piazza. Besides, Cazotti would proclaim himself immediately. Not a whisper, Signori, till we are safe in Scaletta. Come, Madam !

[PEGGY makes a hesitant movement doorward. A rat-tat is heard at the street door.]

NICHOLAS

Ah, Oliver at last, thank God !

PEGGY [*Frenziedly*]

No, no ! I dare not see him—don't let him come !

NICHOLAS

But you must see him ! You shall !

PEGGY

Do you wish me to hate you ? Haven't you made me suffer enough ?

[*Wincing, NICHOLAS goes silently to door C. and opens it, holding the handle and speaking into the hall-way.*]

NICHOLAS

Tell him that my visitors are still here, that I shall expect him to dinner.

NORAH

Si, Signor.

[HE lets the door close. There is a tense moment in which the street door is heard opening, and then a muttered dialogue. Then the door C. opens and NORAH's head is thrust in.]

NORAH

He wants his portfolio.

[PEGGY rushes to get it, clasps it to her breast, then slowly parts with it to NORAH, behind whom the door closes. Another tense silence till the bang of the street door is heard.]

PEGGY [*Frenziedly*]

But you'll explain to him, Daddy—you'll tell him that there are greater things than happiness.

NICHOLAS [*Ecily*]

I will represent to him Your Majesty's point of view.

PEGGY [*Breaking down*]

Oh, Daddy. Don't talk to me like that!

NICHOLAS

Carissima!

[SHE falls into his arms and clings to him wildly. ROXO and his SUITE stand in silent dismay. ROXO frantically shows his wrist-watch to FIUMA. With a sudden inspiration the MARQUIS dashes to the piano and starts the wild barbaric national anthem, which PEGGY unconsciously played earlier. • ROXO and his

SUITE stand at the salute. As the first notes break out, a strange thrill passes visibly through the girl, even DA PIETRA trembles, and as it goes on, SHE gradually and unconsciously detaches herself from him, and listens spellbound. As it reaches its close, the Valdanians take up the words in fiery emotion.

Dio di Valdania,
Salva la patria,
Serva la gloria
Del suo monarca,
Del suo popolo !
Viva la Valdania !

The song gets more and more frenzied. At its climax, in the intoxication of emotion, GENERAL ROXO again offers his arm, and this time PEGGY, hypnotised, takes it—the SUITE, now standing in a double row, lift their swords with a flash and clash them together into an arch, under which the QUEEN and ROXO pass out.]

THE SUITE

Viva la regina ! Viva Margherita ! Viva Margherita
[NICHOLAS stands like a granite image of despair.]

CURTAIN.

Act Two

[*The throne-room in the old San Marco Palace at Scaletta. It is a vast oblong apartment, furnished only with heavy old chairs in embroidered Spanish leather against the rear wall. The throne, ornate and gilded, stands on a dais to the left under a purple canopy, with its back to the wall. Both chair and canopy are blazoned with the arms of Valdania, a serpent encircling an eagle, a crown is sculptured above the chair, and over it on the wall hangs a great old-fashioned sword and buckler, reputed to be Alpastrum's. The floor is mosaic, the rear wall barbaric with battle frescoes ("Alpastrum falling at Rome," etc.), above which hang captured flags. In the centre is a great hearth, now fireless. There are busts of kings or stone figures in niches, and here and there, on narrow oak tables by wall, candlesticks with wax candles. A worn stone step on either side of the rear wall mounts to a balconied casement of coloured glass: that on the right picturing the Madonna and Child, the other full of heraldic blazons of the old Valdanian provinces. The exit to the right is marked by two marble pillars, while rich Oriental hangings to the left denote the entrance to the more private parts of the Palace. Near the right casement is ranged a file of GUARDS under a corporal with fixed bayonets. They are dressed in kilts, with quaint feathered caps, and from their voluminous and brilliantly coloured silken sashes hang scimitars and yataghans. The casement behind is open outwards, showing the stone balcony*

and the far-off shimmering lake and snow-peaks, but not the Piazza da Pietra, which though immediately without, is too far below to be visible. Its existence announces itself, however, as the curtain rises, by the chaotic buzz and laughter of a great holiday crowd, and the festal animation is accentuated by the joyous carillon of bells and the stamping and trampling of police horses. COLONEL THE MARQUIS FIUMA, now Governor of the Palace, in a new military uniform, blazing with decorations, is writing in a notebook.]

VOICES FROM BELOW [*Dominant over the din and bells*]

Order of Procession, official !

Portrait of Queen Margherita—one lira !

Only two soldi—Postcards of the Convent !

*Keep back, please, keep your line !

[Noise of horses wheeling and backing. Some shrieks]

Holy Virgin ! Mind my baby !

The Convent at Rome where Her Majesty was educated—only two soldi !

FIUMA

Close the window—I cannot think !

[CORPORAL VANNI obeys : noises grow subdued, the high-pitched bells give the dominant festal note. The MARQUIS writes silently. Enter excitedly GENERAL ROXO, now Military Governor of Scaletta, booted and spurred, in full gala costume, but with a black band on his only arm. The GUARDS salute,

HE acknowledges the salute mechanically, hardly seeming to see it.]

ROXO

How many men have you guarding the Queen's apartments ?

FIUMA

Nine, Excellency.

ROXO

Double them ! Marrobio has been seen near the Chamber of Deputies.

FIUMA

The Mahdi ? He has ventured down from his mountains ?

ROXO

The Moslem dog is desperate. The Coronation amnesty robbed him of nearly all his followers.

FIUMA

But why didn't you order his arrest ?

ROXO

In such a crowd ! There'd be a panic—innocent people trampled on, while he perhaps got away. Ah, the rōgue knows there's safety in numbers. But Captain Molp has closed all the city gates—we've cut off his retreat.

FIUMA

Better have cut off his advance. But I should have thought the danger-zone is Parliament, especially while the Queen stands reading her speech. He can't get in here.

ROXO

Marrobio is a man of genius. And profiting by his ancient acquaintance with the Palace, he may even get into the Queen's room. And it would scarcely be an auspicious inauguration of your new Palace duties, my dear Colonel, if——

FIUMA

Enough, Excellency. And thanks for the warning !
[*Hurried exit through the hangings L.*]

ROXO

Corporal Vanni ! Your salute just now lacked snap. Be careful it is more precise for Her Majesty—why, that blackguard has never pipeclayed his belt ! Let him have a day in the cells—to-morrow !

VANNI

Yes, my General !

ROXO

And go back to the ranks yourself.

VANNI

Yes, my General !

[*ROXO hurries out between the pillars. The GUARDS have scarcely time to salute. After an instant the men begin to titter at the CORPORAL.*]

VANNI

Silence, pigs ! I am still swineherd to-day !

[THEY grow rigid. *A pause*]

Say, comrades, if any of you would like to buy those brooches with the Queen's picture, come to me. My brother-in-law makes 'em.

[GUARDS relax]

The Jew hawkers are all profiteers—do you know what they pay for the picture postcards of the Convent where our Margherita was hidden away all those years ? . . . Not a single soldo ! . . .

[*A noise in the corridor*]

Attention !

[GUARDS rigid]

Ah, false alarm !

[GUARDS relax]

As I was saying, my brother-in-law can afford to let me have the brooches cheap because, though this procession is nothing to the Coronation, he's let his shop front for double then—he ought to pay Entertainment Tax !

GUARDS [*In parasitic laughter*]

Ha ! ha ! ha !

VANNI [*Beaming*]

They should make *me* Chancellor of the Exchequer—

[*Curtains L. part, showing the MARQUIS FIUMA returning. GUARDS grow rigid.*]

FIUMA [*Crossing to CORPORAL*]

Be sure you let no one in a turban pass to-day unchallenged—except of course the Turkish Ambassador.

VANNI

Yes, my Colonel.

[MARQUIS is moving out]

But how shall I know it's the Turkish Ambassador ?

FIUMA

By his coming to the State Banquet, imbecile. But that won't be till thirteen o'clock.

[HE turns and smiles as the curtains part, revealing the DUCHESS D'AZOLLO, Mistress of the Robes and Grand Mistress of the Court, with her two beautiful MAIDS OF HONOUR. The DUCHESS is aged and stately, with a mantilla and a great necklace of rough uncut stones : the girls wear little red fezzes covered with seed-pearl and gold design, while their hair, coiled or plaited, is rolled under the edge of the cap.]

FIUMA

Ha, aunt, you're up ! Headache better ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Never mind my headache ! Who are all these strange men hovering about our apartments ?

FIUMA

Detectives, Duchess.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [Drily]

So I thought by our detecting them.

FIUMA

Ha! ha! ha! But seriously, aunt—if it won't frighten these charming damsels—Marrobio's on the war-path.

DUCHESS AND MAIDS [*In horror*]

Marrobio!

FIUMA

Oh, not in the Palace—only near Parliament.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

See how curses come home to roost! If King Tito had not had a Moslem mistress——

FIUMA [*Indicating* MAIDS OF HONOUR]

Sh!

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Oh, they know all about the Mahdi's parentage. I repeat, if King Tito had confined himself to Christian ladies——

FIUMA

My hair wouldn't be turning as grey as yours, aunt. However, let us be thankful for large mercies, seeing that Marrobio is the only jar in this wonderful harmony. Confess, Duchess, though you didn't like the Duke's Regency drying up, the Queen's coming has worked miracles. Moslem, Greek-Orthodox, Catholics are at one in adoration—it is a religion!

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [*Drily*]

With the Duke as High Priest.

FIUMA

Uncle always had an excellent taste in pictures. And when did a people have a more artistic head on its stamps and coins ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Ah, you are *all* in love with her !

FIUMA [*Smiling evasively*]

You don't include the Prime Minister ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Why else did Cazotti fish her up ? If it wasn't that Margherita is her mother's image I should suspect he'd foisted some love-child of his own on the throne. Why didn't he tell us all these years he had rescued the infant Princess and was educating her in a Roman convent ?

FIUMA [*A bit embarrassed*]

Hasn't he explained that he wanted the country to settle down constitutionally, that he couldn't risk her being murdered like her mother ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

But he could risk the Duke being murdered as Regent ! Anyhow, it's too dreadful his making his wife a Dame of Honour. In King Tito's day she wouldn't even have been received at Court.

FIUMA

And do you suppose Cazotti can help himself ? His wife is his cross.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

It's all a dreadful warning against democracy. Since the creature's been Lady of the Bedchamber, she considers herself one of the Royal Family. Have you noticed how she copies the Queen's dresses? By the way, I do think that horrible Jew-Baroness Gripstein should be forbidden to wear a necklace just like mine.

FIUMA

What do necklaces matter? What revolts me is her horrible husband wearing the Order of the Redeemer—

[*Boom of distant gun. THE DUCHESS and MAIDS shriek*]

No, no, that's not Marrobio, that's only the gun proclaiming the Queen has left Parliament.

[*Re-enter ROXO, R. The GUARDS present arms.*]

ROXO

Ah, Duchess, I'm glad your headache is better.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

My headache was only for royal consumption. The idea of expecting me to ride with the Countess Cazotti!

ROXO

It is with the Queen you would have been riding; it was your duty to accompany Her Majesty to the opening of Parliament.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

I am sure that the Queen prefers the company of my husband!

[*Sweeps out L. with her ladies.*]

FIUMA [*Laughingly to GENERAL ROXO*]
Dear aunt ! She's jealous !

ROXO [*Smiling*]

How absurd ! Why, the Duke told me over a cigar that the Virgin Queen fills him with a strange new reverence for womanhood, and that this is the first time he's ever been in love *innocently*.

FIUMA

And it's the first time the Duchess has ever been jealous ! How funny ! I suppose, having nothing to hide this time, he takes no precautions. But I sympathise with the old boy's latest passion. I'd propose myself, if I didn't know I'd be ordered off to instant execution.

ROXO

You are not far wrong. An asset like the Queen is not to be wasted.

FIUMA [*With a half-angry, half-comical grimace*]
Wasted ?

ROXO

You know Valdania must lay her out to the best advantage—she can restore our political fortunes.

FIUMA [*Consciously shocked and unconsciously jealous*]
You are already devising her marriage ?

ROXO

Already? Do you suppose there were no princes inspecting her at the Coronation?

FIUMA

Poor Queen! Surely a better way to restore our political fortunes would be to win back our lost province.

ROXO [*Roaring*]

What?

FIUMA

That's what they are saying at the Officers' Club—
Death to Bosnavina!

ROXO

Death to Valdania, they mean. You remember the old saying:

“Who draws the sword of Alpastroom
Writes our or Bosnavina's doom.”

FIUMA [*Laughingly*]

A safe prophecy. But our young bloods drink to “The Day” and believe the Queen is our war-mascot. They even toast her by her obsolete title of “Duchess of Bosnavina,” and they would die for her to a man.

ROXO

Hush!

[*Indicates soldiers.*]

FIUMA

They don't count.

ROXO [*In low tones*]

Bosnavina has her filthy spies everywhere—not to mention Cazotti's.

[*Aloud*]

Withdraw your men, Corporal, till I give the word.

VANNI

Yes, my General; into file, right turn, quick march.

[*Exeunt GUARDS, R.*]

FIUMA

You seem very agitated, General.

ROXO

Because we're not ready for war. And Bosnavina—our friend in her War Office informs us—grows stronger daily.

FIUMA

Then why not get our blow in before she's too strong? All the young officers keep asking me—thinking I'm in the know—When are we going to get our knife into the beastly Bosnavinians?

ROXO

These cockerels crow too soon.

FIUMA

No! They feel "The Day" dawning. Why, as Dramatic Censor, I've had three plays this month all breathing *Delenda est Bosnavina*.

ROXO [*Alarmed*]

Cristo! You stopped them, of course ?

FIUMA

Of course. It's not for playwrights to interfere in politics.

ROXO

Nor for new-whelped officers. Let them stick to their dicing and womanising.

[*Going out R.*]

FIUMA

With all respect, General, you shouldn't have stopped duelling. It lets off some of the blood.

ROXO [*Turning*]

They don't meditate a raid, these hotheads ?

FIUMA [*Hesitating*]

No.

ROXO

The truth !

FIUMA

I don't know that I've the right . . . I must see what my men are up to.

[*Goes L.*]

ROXO [*Red-hot*]

Because if they compromise us before we're ready, I shall hang them like dogs !

FIUMA

It—it isn't exactly a raid on our *irredenta*—that's too mountainous. But the delta of our river which Bosnavina has always possessed——

ROXO

Yes, damn her !

FIUMA

It is there. They claim that the land is only silt washed down by *our* waters, and therefore morally ours.

ROXO

Questionably. Nevertheless——

FIUMA

Agagely, you know, but I fancy the plan is to swoop down and plant our flag on the Custom House.

ROXO

Tomfoolery ! What good will that do ?

FIUMA

Well, they think that this deed of derring-do—while you are dilly-dallying—will raise Valdanian blood-heat and——

ROXO

While I am dilly-dallying ! My God, when I think of our Revenge day and night !—What else have I to think of now my poor Lisa's dead ?

[Wipes his eyes]

They come, these cackling cubs, stuffed with military science from their French or Italian schools, and preach I'm only a slugabed, who must never be made a Marshal.

FIUMA

No, no, sir, you are still the nation's hero.

ROXO

I was—six months ago. But it takes less time to kill off a national hero than to bring a babe to birth. . . . They are right I've lost my grip these black weeks.

[Blows his nose]

I didn't realise there's so much healthy war-spirit.

FIUMA

Isn't it natural, now we're so happy and prosperous ?

ROXO

And it's all through the Queen, God bless her.

[Wipes his eyes]

But I understand now why Cazotti has put a larger army into the Queen's speech.

FIUMA

Has he ? Trust him to keep his ear to the ground.

ROXO

And he pretended it was to conciliate me ! But if the country is coming along of itself . . . All the same, Colonel, warn our young bloods that with this new-

fangled League of Nations always making trouble for the weaker, the first blow must come from Bosnavina, not from us, and if they dare stir a finger before we're ready——

FIUMA

The aide-de-camp on service here to-day is the wildest—I'll speak to him at once.

[*Exit L. ROXO hums happily and moves R.*]

ROXO [*Calling genially*]

Come along, Corporal!

VANNI

Subito, my General! Left turn, march!

[*Re-enter GUARDS, and take up old position.*]

ROXO

You may keep your stripes.

VANNI

Thank you, my General!

[*Exit ROXO, R., humming on happily. GUARDS salute*]

You see, you swine!

[*Stretches himself*]

... Time the Queen got home! I'm ravenous. On duty since dawn. They never consider us, these grandees. I don't mean the Queen, God bless her—she'd chuck us her own macaroni if she knew! But I

suppose we're better off than those poor devils down there, standing all night on the Piazza, eh? True, they've got their grub with them. Good idea! Has anybody got any string?

[Various pieces are offered to the tyrant]

That! Wouldn't even go round your neck! . . . Ah, that's more like it! . . .

[HE ties pieces together to the end of a bayonet]

Fools hunger, wise men fish.

[GUARDS laugh. HE pushes open casement R., letting in noises as before. But the bells have ceased and the cries of the hawkers are now dominated by the gipsy-like strains of folk music from the guzlas (the two-stringed mandolines) and the shrill sounds of bagpipes. The CORPORAL goes out on the balcony and drops his fishing-line into the Piazza, shouting down]

Hi, there! Don't eat it all!

[Laughter and applause comes up from the crowd, other noises are stilled in the general interest. The CORPORAL'S men move from their file and crowd round casement]

Tie it on! Thanks! Ah, that's coming, coming, coming—

[A breathless moment, followed by a loud roar]

Damn!

[GUARDS join in laughter]

No, it's too dirty now . . . A tin of meat? Thanks, Abdullah Mashallah, or whatever your name is . . . May your shadow never grow less! . . . Pass it up to the urchin astride Tito's statue and he'll pass it to the rascal trespassing on the flagstaff . . . Tie it round

tight, you son of a squirrel! That's it. Coming—coming—coming—come!

[*Crowd and GUARDS clap hands in vast amusement.*

- CORPORAL *re-enters, closing casement, and begins detaching the package from his fishing-rod]*

Cristo! He gives good weight!

USHER [*Without, R.*]

The saints preserve your Excellency!

[*A lightning rush of GUARDS to get into line, and of the CORPORAL to pocket the package and string.*]

VANNI [*Looking off*]

Oh, it's only the Jew-Baron. But it pays to salute him. Attention, pigs!

- [*Enter BARON GRIPSTEIN in gala attire, wearing the sash of the Order of the Redeemer. He is a somewhat florid personage of sympathetic and intelligent appearance, with marked Semitic features. The GUARDS present arms.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Beaming*]

Ah, Corporal, this is a great day for our country—you must all drink to it.

[*Distributes notes.*]

VANNI AND GUARDS

The saints preserve your Excellency!

[*Re-enter FIUMA, L.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Turning*]

Buon giorno, Marquis. You're looking so much better

than when I carried a candle behind you in the Corpus Domini Procession.

[MARQUIS *stares frigidly*]

Ah, you are wondering why I am so early for the banquet. But I had business with the Comptroller of the Household, and I know I couldn't get through the crowd again even to escort the Baroness. Marvellous weather, is it not? Queen's weather we are beginning to call it. It was the same, you remember, when Cazotti brought her home from the Convent, and the same at the Coronation.

[FIUMA *has insolently turned his back on the BARON and is writing in his notebook*]

Oh, how she has pulled the country together—I never was so proud of being a Valdanian. But I see you have no time for gossip. I don't wonder, with your responsibilities to-day. *A rivederla* at the banquet.

[*Exit R. The GUARDS salute.*]

FIUMA

How dare you salute a Jew?

VANNI

So sorry, my Colonel. We salute everybody with the Order of the Redeemer. Attention!

[ROXO *re-enters and the fresh salute stops the discussion.*]

FIUMA

Did you see the Jew?

ROXO

I met him, but I didn't see him.

FIUMA

And I didn't hear him. Ha ! ha ! ha !

ROXO

This is no time for amusement. Marrobio has eluded us.

FIUMA

Escaped through a city gate ?

ROXO

Would to God he had ! Captain Molp got the Queen safely into the carriage and it is moving faster than the crowd likes. But what if Marrobio is lurking just below us to stab or shoot her as she alights ?

FIUMA

He'd be torn in pieces.

ROXO

He'd think it worth while, and that Paradise and its houris awaited him.

FIUMA

We ought to have arrested him while we had the chance.

ROXO

Perhaps you were right. But I hate wasting life. I'll see if I can spy him.

[HE mounts step R., pushes open casement and

steps on balcony. The noises almost instantly change into one great cry of "Roxo! Roxo! Viva Roxo!" (HE shrinks back modestly)]

For heaven's sake!

[Closes casement]

This is not *my* day!

FIUMA *[Smiling]*

What about the forgotten national hero? Eh?

ROXO *[Steps down]*

We were speaking of silly young officers.

[Hums happily again, turns genially to CORPORAL]

Your men must be famished. What? There's time before the Queen arrives to snatch a mouthful.

VANNI

God bless you, my General. Right wheel, forward!

ROXO

But keep your ears open for the National Anthem—or I'll cut 'em off.

VANNI

Ah, my General, when shall we cut 'em off the beastly Bosnavinians?

ROXO

You prattle too much.

[Exeunt GUARDS, R.]

ROXO

One thing puzzles me, Colonel. How did Marrobio in his remote fastness know that to-day the Queen would open Parliament ?

FIUMA

I suppose one of his amnestied followers passed on the date. •

ROXO

Unless it was Cazotti !

FIUMA

The Prime Minister ! Oh come, Excellency ! That's too cynical.

[Looks towards Piazza]

I suppose there's no other measure we can take.

ROXO

None. In war there is always the unexpected And this dare-devil descent of Marrobio's—— ! We can only pray that the God of Valdania will protect our Margherita.

FIUMA

Amen !

ROXO

And baffle Cazotti.

FIUMA

No, I won't say "Amen" to that. Cazotti has obviously abandoned his hopes of the crown and finds

consolation in the prestige he has extracted from the very collapse of them. Yes, he may rob your Excellency of the glory of restoring the Queen, he may stamp his fraud on the mob with films and picture postcards, but as for conniving with a rebel to murder her—no! no! What was it Da Pietra called him? A modern *condottiere*! And murder isn't modern.

ROXO

I wouldn't trust him if a mediæval opportunity came his way! Look how he had Marrobio's lieutenant murdered.

FIUMA

Do you mean the one who surrendered at the Coronation amnesty? But you acquiesced——!

ROXO

It was a painful State necessity. The amnesty was indiscreet, too wide—the man probably meant to spy. But what I might do or permit for State reasons, Cazotti is capable of doing to gain the throne. See, anyhow, that the office of royal taster isn't abolished—the most subtle poisons *are* modern.

FIUMA

But if you are right, what can one do against such a man?

ROXO

Only what I do do; work with him. It's the only means of keeping a check on him. Let him rob me of

my glory, I use him for the glory of God and Valdania. You see how he is coming our way with his Army Bill. As a matter of fact, I find it easier to handle a devil like Cazotti than an angel like the Queen.

FIUMA [*Smiling*]

What has Her Majesty done now ?

ROXO

Oh, nothing new. I'm only thinking of the trouble she gave us over his convent story. These American college girls have such a primitive sense of truth.

FIUMA

I rather admired it.

ROXO

You're getting as sentimental as the Duke. Public personages cannot keep private consciences. I don't know what Cazotti would have done if his most reverend eminence, her confessor, hadn't instructed her that a fiction in the State interest is not merely venial but a virtue. Even so, you remember, the obstinate creature would go into a Roman convent for a term.

FIUMA

Which only gave Cazotti the opportunity of photographing the place, with Margherita in the background.

ROXO

And himself in the foreground.

FIUMA

And himself in the foreground.

USHER [*Outside, R.*]

Way there for the Prime Minister.

FIUMA

Talk of the—— !

[*Enter CAZOTTI in gala dress, with stars and orders. He is short and stout, like Napoleon, with a big head carefully modelled on his. Manner genial. HE comes forward holding out both hands.*]

CAZOTTI

What luck to find you both before the banquet !

ROXO [*Taking one hand*]

What luck to be found !

FIUMA [*Taking the other*]

Dear Count Cazotti, what can we do for you ?

CAZOTTI

Exercise your military censorship over the newspapers. The Queen has altered the Queen's speech !

ROXO

Your speech, you mean.

CAZOTTI

Ah, I know in your heart you militarists would like to bring back autocracy. But that's impossible in these

days of popular control. One would have thought all this glory and huzzahing quite enough for a young girl without her itching to interfere in State affairs—there must be fair division, what? Why, here am I who have carried the real burden of Valdania for years, and yet were I to go out into that crowd——!

FIUMA, [*Slily*]

Your Excellency wasn't cheered, coming?

CAZOTTI

I dodged the route—I was in a hurry to stop her indiscretions getting into print.

ROXO

But the papers are in your own hands.

CAZOTTI

Mine? I parted with all such interests when I took office.

FIUMA

Ahem!

CAZOTTI

Word of honour, Marquis. To Baron Gripstein, if you want to know.

ROXO

Our press in Jewish hands!

CAZOTTI

The best way to keep it tame. No, it's not Gripstein's papers I'm afraid of—they had the official

speech in type before it was delivered—it's these irresponsible Pacifist organs——

ROXO [*Alarmed*]

She didn't cut out the increase of the army ?

CAZOTTI

Oh no ! I worded it " Reform of the Army " and she thought it meant diminution.

ROXO AND FIUMA

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Ah, but she poured out a programme that wouldn't leave a penny for our glorious army—roads, bridges, canals, railways, irrigation, schools, colleges,—all the things she found in America and can't find here. Would to God she *had* been brought up in my Roman Convent !

ROXO

Didn't she promise everybody a bathroom ?

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! We had enough worry building her own bathroom. You remember the trouble to put in the telephone. The old Palace doesn't lend itself to these new-fangled devices ; especially as it began life as a monastery.

FIUMA

But how on earth did she know we need canals and bridges ?

GAZOTTI

It's that old fool, the Duke D'Azollo, who motors her about—Oh, I'm sorry—I forgot he was your aunt's husband.

FIUMA

He often forgot it himself.

[*Laughter*]

But won't the Queen be angry if we cut out her canals and—— ?

• CAZOTTI

That's all right. I just met the Baron in the corridor, and he'll have a special copy of the *Gazetta* printed off for her, with her indiscretions in full. That's the only paper she reads herself. The rest are summarised by her secretary and he will report that they are all enthusiastic about her bathrooms—I beg her pardon, canals.

[*ROXD and HE laugh.*]

FIUMA

• How we all deceive her ! Her position is pitiful.

CAZOTTI

Pitiful ? It is magnificent !

FIUMA

It isn't very magnificent to be cut off from the people you've been brought up among ! To have your letters and wires stopped without your knowledge ! It's like writing to the dead, she said to me once, with tears in her eyes. To make me feel worse, I had to suggest that the reason she got no answers from Da Pietra and Oliver Randel was that they would not forgive her for deserting them—and now she goes about resigned, ecstatic even, like a young nun cut off from her past. You may imagine the relief to me to have no more letters to open !

ROXO

What ! While I was at my poor wife's death-bed, you have let Her Majesty stop writing heart-to-heart letters !

FIUMA

I don't understand——

ROXO

What other means have we of discovering her secret thoughts ? And when it comes to providing her with a Prince Consort——

CAZOTTI

Most true. We must at once find her another correspondent.

ROXO

Not possible. One can't suddenly create for her a friend to whom she'll pour herself out.

CAZOTTI

I have it. I'll remove the Duke from the capital.

• ROXO

Banish him ?

CAZOTTI

No, no—send him on a mission. Then we can read her letters before delivery.

ROXO

Splendid !

FIUMA

I don't like it. And besides, he won't go.

• CAZOTTI

I'll send him to study canals—then he won't dare displease her by refusing.

ROXO

Ha ! ha ! ha ! One of your best combinations.

CAZOTTI

And, on second thoughts, why suppress her peace programme at all ? It's the very thing to keep the Pacifists off the scent. Eh, General ?

• ROXO

I don't know what you mean.

CAZOTTI

Come, come! I play cards on table. If you're not out to smash Bosnavina, why all these ice-axes, cat-shoes, skis and alpenstocks that the War Office still accumulates against Marrobio under your demand? So many mountain-batteries, such heaps of munitions against one practically isolated individual?

ROXO

I don't deny that since my boyhood the Revenge has been my dream—if I have been converted to Da Pietra's policy and yours, it is to unite all Valdania for the great day. But the hour is not ripe.

CAZOTTI

It is ripe—the people are itching for their lost mountains—the young officers drink to “The Day!”

FIUMA [*Startled*]

You know?

CAZOTTI

Everything, my dear Marquis—even to the projected raid on the delta.

ROXO

A fatal folly. We are not ready.

CAZOTTI

So you said twenty years ago. You never really change.

ROXO

And you're always changing.

CAZOTTI

I change with the times—like the thermometer with the temperature.

ROXO

Or the weathercock with the wind. Then is politics only inconsistency raised to a career?

CAZOTTI

To a science. The science of public opinion. Val-dania feels her life tingling. Now is the moment to strike. Now or never.

ROXO

For you, perhaps—I, too, play cards on table. My Queen has trumped your knave—Jack. And you seek to recover your old ascendancy over the people.

CAZOTTI

It is the people that seeks to recover our old ascendancy over Bosnavina.

ROXO

The people's heart is sound, but its head is wood.

CAZOTTI

The better to butt with! Come, I'd make you *Marshal Roxo*.

ROXO [*Alarmed*]

For God's sake ! There are five reasons that forbid war, any one sufficient.

CAZOTTI

And the first ?

ROXO

Marrobio. So long as he is unchanged, we dare not draw off our forces.

CAZOTTI

But he is all but deserted.

ROXO

The opportunity would win him fresh followers. *A propos*, you know him from the old Tito days. Do step out on the balcony and see if he's in the crowd.

CAZOTTI [*Agitated*]

He's in Scaletta ?

ROXO

Alas !

CAZOTTI

And you ask me to make myself a target for him !
No, thank you.

FIUMA

I'll look if you like, though I don't know him from Adam.

[*Going to casement*]

Except by his clothes. Ha ! ha ! What sort of man is he ?

ROXO

Tall, noble even.

[FIUMA mounts step L., and pushes open casement
L. *A military march is heard in the distance.*]

FIUMA

Ah, do you hear ? The Queen must be close on the Strada da Pietra. That's her own peace-song . . .

[*Steps out on balcony and looks down*]

There's a whole group of Moslems just below—tall, short, and in-between.

ROXO

Never mind. We must trust to God.

[FIUMA comes in.]

FIUMA [*Closing casement*]

Jolly tune, isn't it ? Makes a good march.

[*Descends step to the rhythm, now heard more plainly.*]

ROXO

The Queen has quite a little talent, musicians tell me. But it's a mistake for royal personages to expose themselves even to praise. The University can make them Doctors of Science or Music, but they oughtn't to know anything of either.

CAZOTTI

Ah, but look what an asset to have the Queen's own music for a war-march. Let us make it the Valdanian "Tipperary."

ROXO [*Roughly*]

It's a long, long way to Tipperary.

CAZOTTI

Ah, yes, your five reasons. And the second?

ROXO

We've no general! No, don't say me—I'm a cavalry man, not a mountain fighter. Besides, I'm getting too old for campaigning—my wife's death has not left me unshaken—my absent arm reports itself sometimes—even to-day—oh, only a twinge, I just mention it. Still, my present home duties are about all I'm fit for. But even if I felt as young as when I fought Da Pietra, Valdania lacks—and that's obstacle number three—an honest man at the War Office!

CAZOTTI

You accuse——!

FIUMA

But, General, if they've got you your ice-axes——!

ROXO

The commissions were good—I speak my mind. And suppose somebody tried a coup on the Bourse! No, by God, I won't be betrayed from the rear.

CAZOTTI

Well, take the War Office yourself. Only find me another great general.

ROXO

There is none. I make no pretences. Valdania has no great mountain-fighter—except the Mahdi!

CAZOTTI

Except Marrobio! Ha! ha! ha!

FIUMA

Ha! ha! ha! What a joke!

ROXO

But the grim truth. One needs guerilla experience, and all the military genius of his grandfather, Boris the Bloody, which skipped over Tito, has come for our sins to Marrobio . . .

[Pricks up his ears]

Why has the music stopped?

CAZOTTI

It must be the halt at the Palace of Justice. The Deputation of Judges—

ROXO

Damn the fools! Multiplying risks like that. That's where Marrobio will be.

[Bitterly]

He's a judge—of positions.

CAZOTTI

Don't let's get off the track. What's your fourthly ?

ROXO

We dare not attack Bosnavina and have the League of Nations on our back.

CAZOTTI

Pooh ! I'm surprised at you, General. Bosnavina shall open the ball. We've only got to insult that pod of pepper, her Ambassador.

FIUMA

Ha ! ha ! ha ! It was just because Bosnavina did *not* open the ball that we nearly got our war months ago.

ROXO [*Agitated*]

Eh ? What is this I hear ?

FIUMA [*Smiling*]

You didn't know ? At the Coronation Ball the Queen led off the cotillon with the American Minister instead of with Prince Condrexoulouk. The Prince flung out of the ballroom, grinding his false teeth.

CAZOTTI

Seriously, it was all I could do to prevent war.

ROXO

Good God ! Why wasn't I told ?

FIUMA

You were away. Your wife was dying.

ROXO

What did that matter ? With the country in danger ! But you were Chamberlain then, sir. Why did you convey the Queen's command to dance ? Why didn't you warn her ?

FIUMA

I did. Only she wouldn't take me seriously. She said she wanted to talk about America and that the poor Minister looked so drab amid all his parrot-coloured colleagues. Not that I quite understood myself why our best-hated neighbour must always have precedence.

ROXO

Prince Condrexoulouk is the doyen of the Diplomatic Corps as well as a Highness, and, anyhow, an Ambassador is bigger than a Minister.

FIUMA

Well, we can't insult him in the ballroom any longer, for he can only walk with a stick now.

CAZOTTI

We'll find a way. What's your fifthly ?

*[Music strikes up again.]**

ROXO

Ah, they're moving on. Thank God ! . . . I beg your pardon ?

CAZOTTI

Your, fifthly ?

ROXO

Ah yes, fifthly and finally, no money !

CAZOTTI

Pah ! Now that the Queen has brought stability, and our standing on the Bourses has risen, a loan on the world-market, Gripstein assures me—— .

ROXO

The Baron ? We're to go to the Jews !

CAZOTTI

Fiddlesticks ! The man's as fervent a Catholic as you, and an even fiercer anti-Semite !

ROXO

And a Knight of the Order of the Redeemer ! A man with no quarterings—not even a shield ! Ah, Cazotti, how can I work with you, when you give a Jew—— ?

CAZOTTI

But it was the Duke who insisted on it—the outgoing Regent.

ROXO

Whose pictures Gripstein bought back for him.

FIUMA [*Smiling*]

The Baron certainly *pays* his way !

CAZOTTI

But the pictures are only to be the Duke's during his lifetime. Then Gripstein gives them to the nation.

ROXO

The nation shall refuse them if I'm alive !

CAZOTTI

Hoity-toity ! We've already accepted two hospitals and an officers' orphanage. You tried raising money without him. You went to America. What did you bring back ?

ROXO [*Roaring*]

I brought back the Queen !

CAZOTTI

Hush ! Yes, of course. But the Queen is scarcely convertible into cash. Ah, here comes the converter himself——

FIUMA

The converted, you mean.

[*Laughter.* HE and ROXO ostentatiously turn their backs on the BARON, who enters R.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I've arranged it all, your Excellency.

CAZOTTI

Then 'phone it all off, please. We want the Queen's actual speech reported in full everywhere.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Then you adopt her peace programme ?

CAZOTTI

Enthusiastically. You approve ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I am enchanted. It is just what Valdania needs to restore her position among the Powers.

CAZOTTI

Only it will mean money——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And why not that loan on the world-market—— ?

CAZOTTI

Because—to tell the truth—these gentlemen object to your agency !

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Skirting suddenly round to face them, with oriental emotion and gesture*]

Ah, Signori ! But I owe Valdania everything. My wealth, my nationality, my wife, my children, my religion.

[*Voice husky with tears*]

In Germany I was a pariah ; my sons couldn't have been officers. And you refuse me the opportunity of proving my gratitude !

FIUMA

And increasing your profits !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

No, Marquis. The State shall have my commission.

[Wipes his eyes]

On my honour as a Knight of the Redeemer !

ROXO

The man seems genuine . . .

[Holds out his hand]

Excuse my left hand !

[The BARON grips it fervently]

But . . . see how I trust your honour—suppose the loan was wanted for war !

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Ecstatically]*

For war against Bosnavina ?

ROXO

Hush ! You approve ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I am enchanted. It is just what Valdania needs to restore her position among the Powers. The great Valdania ! Ah, how happy my boys will be ! The dream of "The Day" is their day-dream. When are we going to get our knives into those beastly Bosnavinians, they keep asking me. Only yesterday my Sigismondo repeated the old prophecy :

"When Rome yields up our royal seed,
Bosnavina to death shall bleed."

And I thought to myself, surely it means *now*—the Roman convent yielding up our beloved Queen !

[The three look at one another like Roman augurs.]

CAZOTTI

Ahem ! Your reading may be—useful. Though it is usually read to mean the resurrection of our national hero, Alpastroom, who was buried in Rome and whose sword is piously preserved in this very room.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Proudly*]

I know, I know.

[*Looking at it over the throne*]

“Who draws the sword of Alpastroom
Writes our or Bosnavina’s doom.”

FIUMA [*Laughing*]

Ha ! ha ! That oracle always amuses me. And if he fell in Rome, how comes his sword here ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, we must not question our old traditions. They are the poetry of life. I’ll ’phone at once about the newspapers and take soundings for the loan——

CAZOTTI

But to build canals, etc., remember. Indeed, we can always begin with strategic railways. What a blessing in disguise the Queen’s speech is proving !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Your peace programme shall be welcomed in all my papers.

[*Going.*]

FIUMA

But won't that be awkward—if we do get our war ?

• **CAZOTTI**

Bless you, my young friend, the public has no memory. The head of wood, what ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! . . . Oh, and Baron, let there be telegrams from Bosnavina on the oppression of our co-nationals—school children lashed for speaking Valdanian, our women raped, and so on. And—wait a moment—the *Gazetta* must have a leader on the spread of Valdanian culture through the Balkans—

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My Sigismondo shall write it. He is particularly keen on our mission.

- [*Exit R., murmuring unctuously*]
“ When Rome yields up our royal seed—— ”

FIUMA

These Jews are incredible. . . .

[*Music swells. A fiery roll of the drums*]
Ah, she's coming !

ROXO

They won't have eyes for me now.

[*Rushes to balcony R., and peers down. Now only a mere buzz of intense expectation comes up, together with the marching and the music*]

My God ! Fiuma ! He's there !

FIUMA [*Rushing to join him*]

Where ?

ROXO

That towering figure—just where the Queen must dismount! God help her!

FIUMA

What can we do?

ROXO

Rush your men at once—

FIUMA

Arrest him—?

ROXO

Not till she's passed. Wedge him in so that he can't move a finger.

[National Anthem breaks out, as at end of First Act]

Quick! Quick!

[As FIUMA rushes down, CAZOTTI deliberately rushes up and blocks him a moment on the stone step.]

CAZOTTI

So sorry . . .

[Rushes on balcony]

Where is he?

[GUARDS hurry in R., munching and wiping their mouths. Distant cheers begin, rolling rapidly nearer.]

VANNI

Halt, swine! Right wheel!

CAZOTTI

Her milk-white horses are red with rose-leaves !

ROXO

God grant it may not be with blood.

[*Desperately*]

Where are our men ? Why don't they come ?

CAZOTTI

I can't bear to look.

[*Comes down and sits on the step with his back to ROXO, his face betraying his real hopes.*]

ROXO

Ah, there's our men ! . . . But the soldiers won't let 'em pass—God damn their cabbage-heads !

CAZOTTI

Why this silence ?

ROXO [*At white-heat*]

Another address ! They've stopped the carriage.

[*Stamps foot*]

Corpo di Dio ! Who allowed it ?

CAZOTTI

The Master of Ceremonies, I suppose. I had nothing to do with it.

ROXO

Don't excuse yourself—who accuses you ?

[*Looks again*]

Damnation ! Little girls with bouquets—she's kissing them, curse them !

[Stamps foot]

Marrobio's eye is focussed on her like a burning glass.
Oh !

[Covers eyes, then when he re-opens them gives an exultant cry]

Ah ! Our men have wriggled in ! Bravo, Fiuma !
Bravo !

[Claps hands.]

CAZOTTI *[Disconcerted, dolefully clapping hands]*
Bravo ! bravissimo !

ROXO

She's inside ! Ouf !

[Drops on chair, trembling all over.]

CAZOTTI

Thank God !

[Wipes his forehead.]

[There is a stir in the Palace. From either side courtiers come trooping in, the DUCHESS and her maids, and other ladies of honour in elaborate and fantastic Court costumes not quite Western, some wearing gold sequins for decoration and others long earrings, officers and aides-de-camp glittering with epaulettes and gold lace, chamberlains, controllers, heralds in tabards, stewards with cocked hats and swords and strange traditional costumes. The National Anthem still vibrates in the back-

ground. All dispose themselves looking towards R. From the corridor comes the stir of an advancing procession, and trumpeters are heard sounding a fanfare on silver trumpets. The excitement mounts to fever heat. The GENTLEMEN USHER, a magnificently gilded being, enters.]

USHER,

Way for the Queen !

[Preceded by trumpeters, equerries, grooms and other gentlemen-at-arms, and finally by two halberdiers walking backwards with their long staves, and accompanied by pages bearing bouquets, QUEEN MARGHERITA enters, stepping with hereditary dignity, the crown still on her head, her arms full of roses, and semi-barbaric heirloom jewels flashing from her gold-brocaded gown. Behind her comes an honorary guard of Mohammedan Aghas, in white kilts and scarlet fezzes, coats and shoes, with great sashes stuffed with weapons, and between them and the Queen walk the DUKE D'AZOLLO and the COUNTESS CAZOTTI. The COUNTESS is a vulgar golden-haired beauty, evidently made up, the DUKE is a white-haired courtly old figure with an artistic face. He carries a mass of parchment addresses, and his gold epauletted coat is almost invisible beneath decorations. As the QUEEN enters, all those already assembled curtsy or bow elaborately.]

QUEEN [*Smiling and drawing a long breath*]

So that's over ! . . . Well, General, you see how right I was to refuse your police escort.

ROXO [*Beaming*]
Your Majesty is always right.

QUEEN
But you surely didn't need all those soldiers !

ROXO
Pure decoration, Madam. By the way, when will your Majesty redeem your promise to review them ?

QUEEN
When have I time ? With all those papers Cazotti makes me sign. Ah, here he is ! How *did* you get here before me ?

COUNTESS CAZOTTI
That's just like my husband's little ways.
[*Titter of courtiers.*]

CAZOTTI [*With angry side-glance*]
I flew, Madam, to welcome you home after your Parliamentary success.

QUEEN
Then you didn't really mind my little additions ?

CAZOTTI
Mind ? The Government has gratefully adopted them.

QUEEN [*Clapping hands girlishly*]
You make me so happy ! If only Daddy were here to see how wrong he was !

CAZOTTI

Ah, but King Tito lived in different times.

• QUEEN [*Clouded*]

King Tito? Ah! Yes, of course——

[*Bites her lips and turns to DUCHESS*]

I am glad your headache is better. Your husband has been so kind with the addresses and bouquets. You'll put them all in water, won't you, Marchesa?

[*The DUKE hastens to hand the addresses to that Lady-in-Waiting. The QUEEN laughs a ringing, girlish laugh*]

No, not those, dry as they are!

[*The MARCHESA and the pages go off with the flowers and parchments, save a few roses retained by the QUEEN.*]

• DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Your Majesty must prepare for the banquet.

CAZOTTI

Not before pacifying the people. Listen!

[*Cries of "Margherita! Margherita!" are coming up from the Piazza*]

You must show yourself a moment. .

QUEEN

But they've just seen me!

• ROXO •

Quite so. Why expose yourself unnecessarily?

QUEEN

Those silly alarms again. I shall go just to frighten you.

[CAZOTTI hurries to open casement L. The QUEEN steps out, and the air becomes one vast vibration: "Viva, Margherita! Viva, Margherita!" SHE comes in again, shaken with emotion. But the cries redouble. "Speech! Speech!" Between laughter and crying]

Another Queen's speech?

[Laughter of the COURTIERs.]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

But my husband makes those! Go along, Alexis!

CAZOTTI [In fierce whisper]

Hold your tongue!

[Enter BARON GRIPSTEIN, R. HE grasps the situation immediately, and waves his hanükerchief.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Speech! Speech!

COURTIERs [Waving handkerchiefs]

Speech! Speech!

[QUEEN returns to balcony. A magic silence falls.]

QUEEN [In a clear but trembling voice]

My own, my dear people, I thank you all—Moslems and Christians alike—for your welcome to me, I feel so happy to think that after all the years of unrest and

blood, our country is at peace—at peace for evermore.
I thank God that through me——

[*Breaks down with a sob. The COUNTESS CAZOTTI starts forward with her handkerchief.*]

CAZOTTI [*Aside to GRIPSTEIN*]

Splendid, that bit about perpetual peace. See it's reported.

[GRIPSTEIN scribbles in notebook.]

QUEEN [*Recovering*]

When at my Coronation I took the oath of fidelity to your service, I was afraid the burden would be too great for me. But your love is lightening it. I pray God that I may never lose that love or your faith in me, because it is all that I have in the world—all that—that——

[*Breaks into tears, and retreats into the room amid frantic "Vivas!" from within and without. The COURTIERs shout and wave handkerchiefs. The National Anthem breaks out again. ROXO closes the casement in relief. The DUCHESS and COUNTESS rush to wipe the QUEEN's tears, but the COUNTESS wins.*]

QUEEN [*Smiling through her tears*]

It's just like a first-night in New York!

CAZOTTI [*In icy reminder*]

So one reads, Your Majesty.

ROXO [*Equally, alarmed*]

Her Majesty is tired.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Come, Madam.

[*The QUEEN goes with her L. MARQUIS FIUMA rushes in R. and whispers excitedly to ROXO The QUEEN turns with a sudden thought.*]

QUEEN

Oh, as to that review, Roxo——

[*ROXO goes on talking, FIUMA nudges him*]

What are you so absorbed about ?

ROXO

Nothing, Madam, just professional.

QUEEN [*Mockingly*]

More precautions on my account ?

ROXO

The contrary. Colonel Fiuma has just captured the last of the Moslem rebels.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Marrobio ! The saints be praised. *Bravo*, Marquis.

QUEEN

Captured ? But I amnestied them all.

ROXO

This was their leader. He wouldn't accept your grace.

QUEEN [*Smiling*]

Well, I daresay he will now. But everybody seems so pleased, Fiuma, I feel I ought to give you something. The Order of the Redeemer—second class ?

FIUMA [*Overwhelmed*]

Oh, Madam, that is too much !

[*SHE extends her hand graciously, which HE kisses, bowing low.*]

•
QUEEN

And you, too, Cazotti, you must let me express my gratitude for your kindness to-day.

CAZOTTI

Better wait, Madam, till I have carried out your reforms. I shall have the honour of submitting to you to-morrow the members of a roving Commission for Canals and Bridges under the Presidency of the Duke D'Azollo.

QUEEN

Splendid !

[*Claps her hands. The COURTIERs, led by GRIPSTEIN, clap theirs.*]

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Startled*]

Me ? I'm too old—I can't leave my wife !

•
DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

What nonsense !

[*Laughter.*]

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*Making a wry face*]

Everybody wants to get rid of me.

QUEEN

You know I shall miss you very much. Come, sit down a moment, let me persuade you.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

But, Madam, your toilette for the banquet !

QUEEN

I've only to take off my crown and do my hair. But don't let me keep anybody else.

[Everybody melts away with backward bows while the dialogue proceeds.]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Well, give it to me now—it will save time.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

Excuse me, Duchess. That is *my* crown.

[Takes it off.]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Your Majesty will find me in waiting.

[Exit, with dignity.]

QUEEN *[To Countess]*

No, nothing else now.

[Exit COUNTESS backward, with crown.]

And there's no need to keep your men like toy soldiers, Corporal. They can come back for the reception.

VANNI

God bless Your Majesty. Right turn, march.

[Exeunt GUARDS, R.]

QUEEN

Why don't you sit down ? You know the D'Azollos have the right to sit, even were I standing.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I am not here as your premier Duke, but as your premier adorer.

QUEEN

Oh, please ! Haven't I had enough to-day of bobbing statesmen and crawling councillors, not to mention the poem declaring my face turns even the sun to a rushlight ?

[Laughs girlishly]

Ha ! ha ! ha !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

So it does, Your Majesty.

QUEEN

Oh, do forget my Majesty, now we're alone.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

If I can remember to forget it.

QUEEN

Ha ! ha ! ha ! That's like Norah !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Who is Norah ?

QUEEN

Never mind.

[*Sighs*]

Dear Norah !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Now you're sad.

QUEEN [*Recovering herself*]

Because you're so disobedient. Sit down at once, or I'll get up and then you'll have to melt away.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Anything but that.

[*Sits.*]

QUEEN

That's right. Do you remember my first *levée* ?
How I got up from that thing

[*Points to throne*]

to stretch my limbs, and everybody melted away. Oh, how astonished I was ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! Do you know, the only way I can reconcile myself to all this literally religious ceremonial, is by reminding myself I don't really exist.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

What ! You've melted away, too ?

QUEEN

As Queen, I mean, I don't exist—any more than dryads and naiads in ancient Greece. They repre-

sented the spirit of Nature and I represent the spirit of Valdania—it is themselves my people adore in me, the greatness of their own history, their heroic past—what are you smiling at ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

At your taking them seriously. It's their greatness that doesn't exist.

QUEEN.

Oh, surely ! A thousand years of national history- . !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Of natural history—animal squabbles and superstitions. No art, no letters, nothing. A pity Italy has never annexed us.

QUEEN

That at least I shall not take seriously. I know what a devoted Regent you made !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Oh, yes, I could do my royal mumming with a grave face. But I had my royal robe cut with a specially large sleeve—to laugh in !

QUEEN

Then why did you cry at my coronation ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

That's another matter. The incense got into my eyes. And there was the organ music, the lovely hand holding the sceptre, the ecstatic face——

QUEEN

I didn't feel ecstatic, I assure you. When the Cardinal dumped the crown on my head, it felt like a cold iron clamp: the weight of responsibility turned me sick. I nearly fainted. And oh, how scared I was when I woke up this morning and remembered I had to read Cazotti's speech before all those great Ministers and officials! The dawn was just breaking over the mountains. Have you ever watched the dawn?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Only in landscape painting.

QUEEN

Don't jest. It was so beautiful as to be terrible—like God burning over the virgin snows. And below slept the city—a luminous twinkling network, like a second starry heaven. Ah, how I prayed to be worthy of my people's trust! And then there came into my head all that Valdania lacks, and I resolved to put into the speech the things Cazotti had so strangely forgotten.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

A very dangerous resolve, my dear, for both of us.

QUEEN

Do be serious, Duke.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I'm as serious as the Duchess. Queens who say things out of their own heads are apt to lose them. You are moving in a world of pitfalls and politicians. Be

content to charm the Court and give the people a vision. Neither you nor I were meant for Blue Books.

QUEEN

You say that ! You who are always so interested in bridges and canals !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

When you speak of them. I watch your lovely lips like a deaf man.

QUEEN

Oh !

[Rises indignantly.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Sitting stoutly]*

Does that mean I am to melt away ? But you see I exercise the privilege of the D'Azollos.

QUEEN

You do yourself injustice. What about the day we saw all those crude floating bridges ? Didn't you explain to me that they made the river unnavigable and shipping impossible ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I meant how delightful it was to escape the penny steamboats that have ruined Venice.

QUEEN *[Collapses into chair]*

Oh !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

That's right!

QUEEN

But the day our car stuck in the river-swamp. You showed me how on the Bosnavinian bank there were flourishing cities, while on our own side only millions of reeds and willows——

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Precisely. Picturesqueness *plus* immunity from invasion.

QUEEN

Invasion! Why should Bosnavina invade us?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

To anticipate our invading them, of course. Don't they hold a province of ours?

QUEEN

If we drained that marshland, we'd gain a finer province than we lost. Besides, all that was before you were born.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Nations have long memories, as asses have long ears. Aren't you still called "Duchess of Bosnavina," though we haven't set foot there since the Middle Ages? Everybody knows the Revenge is inevitable.

QUEEN [*Springing up again*]

I will not hear of it!

[*HE rises too*]

I shall formally renounce the title. The Bosnavinian Ambassador specially congratulated me at the Coronation and said that peace was Bosnavina's supreme interest.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

And yet you are not uneasy ?

QUEEN [*Moves from him*]

You men are all so cynical. You base politics on hate. Why do you never try Christian love ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I suppose because, like radium, it can only be got in minute quantities. Besides, one can't turn one's other cheek to a mosquito.

QUEEN

The Bosnavinians are not mosquitoes, but children of God like ourselves. And you call yourself a Christian !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I ? Aren't you mixing me up with the Baron ? The Church is only a State form—like your washing of the beggars' feet at Easter—after they had been soaped and scented ! I never even thought there *could* be a God till you incarnated.

QUEEN.

Now you are blasphemous !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Religious, my dear, for the first time. When you talked of God burning over the virgin snows, I felt like one of our mountain roads after a thaw, that keep miraculously amid their slush some little patch of purity. Have your way! I'll go and study canals till I die of rheumatism and boredom.

QUEEN [*Holding out hand impulsively*]

Oh, thank you! No——

[*Laughingly*]

I don't mean you're to die. Ha! ha! ha!

[*HE is kissing her hand and SHE is laughing, when a sudden shattering explosion vibrates through the Palace. THEY start apart*]

What's that?

[*A brief pause. Then the DUCHESS and COURTIERs run in pell-mell from L., some of the ladies caught in the middle of their toilettes, the COUNTESS CAZOTTI without her wig, revealing a comical grey head. The DUCHESS comes to nestle against her husband. ROXO and CAZOTTI rush in together, GRIPSTEIN in their rear.*]

ROXO

Ah, the Queen's safe!

CAZOTTI

Thank God!

BARON GRIPSTEIN

A thousand candles to Our Lady!

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

But what is it ? What has happened ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Nothing to go grey about !

• [The COUNTESS claps her hand to her head and runs back L.]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

One for the crown. Thank you, dear !

ROXO [To the QUEEN]

The fireworks stored up for to-night must have gone off in the vault.

QUEEN

I'm sure it's a bomb. I heard one once in New——

CAZOTTI [Hastily]

Forgive my interrupting you, Madam. But Fiuma is investigating. •

QUEEN

I hope to God nobody is hurt. . . . Ah !

[MARQUIS FIUMA enters R., and whispers to roxo]
Always these whisperings ! Report to me, Fiuma. A bomb, is it not ?

FIUMA

No, Your Majesty, only a hand-grenade.

QUEEN

Anybody hurt ?

ROXO [*Answering quickly*]
One man killed, Madam—Corporal Vanni !

QUEEN [*Wincing*]
Oh ! . . . Not the corporal I just spoke to ?

ROXO
I'm afraid it is.

QUEEN [*Overwhelmed*]
And he said to me as he went out, " God bless you ! "

ROXO
A gross breach of discipline ! And I gather that he owes his death to a still grosser breach. It seems he fished up the grenade from the Piazza, thinking the tin held food, and, being interrupted, put it in his pocket and forgot all about it, till taking it out just now——

QUEEN
Poor creature !

BARON GRIPSTEIN
But he was standing just here, General ; we might any of us have been killed.

ROXO
Precisely.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
Hear, O Israel !

QUEEN

But what demon—— ?

ROXO

Marrobio, Madam.

QUEEN

Marrobio ? And who is Marrobio ?

CAZOTTI

The brute you spoke of pardoning.

QUEEN

The Moslem rebel ? But what can be his motive ?

ROXO

It's a sort of Holy War he preaches. His followers believe he bears a charmed life.

QUEEN

Why was I not told about him ? Have you ever spoken to him ?

ROXO

Not since he was a boy. He was—about the Palace.

QUEEN

Then my parents knew him ?

ROXO [*Embarrassed*]

Er—possibly . . .

[*Cries of "Margherita ! Margherita !" break dully from without*]

But the people are calling for Your Majesty.

QUEEN

What again ?

CAZOTTI

They want to see for themselves you are safe."

QUEEN

What do I matter, when that poor Corporal—— ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Come, Madam, it will relieve them.

ROXO [*To FIUMA*]

Not a word about the wounded !

[The DUKE opens the casement L., and leads her on to the balcony. The reception is more delirious than ever. The crowd starts singing the National Anthem.]

QUEEN [*Coming in, shaken*]

It is really very sweet of them !

[Cries of "Marrobio ! Marrobio !" now resound from the Piazza]

What do they want now ?

FIUMA

To lynch Marrobio.

QUEEN

How horrible ! It's like the South—— !

[Stops herself abruptly]

But you won't give him up ?

ROXO

No, Madam, we can do our own lynching.

QUEEN

Not without trial ?

ROXO

He'll be lucky if it's without torture.

QUEEN

You never torture, surely ?

ROXO .

Only to get a confession. And this man has publicly harried Your Majesty's forces for five years.

QUEEN

Where have you put him ?

ROXO

For the moment in the Palace dungeon.

QUEEN

Has the Palace a dungeon ?

ROXO

Naturally.

QUEEN

How strange ! Things going on around and underneath and one knows nothing. Just bring him up a moment.

ROXO

I beg Your Majesty's pardon ?

QUEEN

I want to see this Marrobio.

ROXO

To see him ? A rebel who tried to blow up your Palace ?

QUEEN

And you are surprised I want to ask him why ?

ROXO

To ask him why ?

QUEEN

Yes, don't you think it's best to talk things out ?
You have never spoken to him since he was a boy.

ROXO

But this is unheard-of. The Queen cannot come in contact with criminals. It is not her sphere.

QUEEN

Whose sphere, then ?

ROXO

The Law's.

QUEEN

But am *I* not the Law ? Don't all your legal documents begin "The Queen *versus* ——" ?

ROXO

That is a mere State form.

QUEEN

A form ! A form ! The Church ! The Law ! Everything to you men is a form. But don't you see that here—for once—it is a reality ? The Queen *versus* Marrobio ! Even a private plaintiff may see the defendant—the Queen has less rights than her meanest subject. .

CAZOTTI

Infinitely greater rights, Madam. She has the prerogative of pardon.

QUEEN

• And why should I pardon without enquiry ? Let the man be brought at once.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

You are overwrought, Madam. The explosion—

QUEEN *

Let me be left with General Roxo !

[DUKE *bows*. COURTIERs *begin to melt away*.]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Your toilette, Madam.

QUEEN [*Stamping foot*]

Let me be left with General Roxo !

CAZOTTI [*To FIUMA*]

Tito's daughter begins to peep out.

[*To QUEEN*]

I hope I may stay too. Your Majesty raises a serious constitutional question.

QUEEN

Ah, you must be two to one. Take the Marquis, take the Baron. Be four to one!

[*Throws her roses away.*]

FIUMA

If Your Majesty will excuse me, I must see to my casualties—my Corporal.

[*Bows and exit R.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Very upset*]

Please don't count *me* against you, Madam.

QUEEN

You treat me as a divinity, yet the first simple thing I ask of you, you refuse me. It's the same when I want to talk to somebody on our drives—my ladies always object to this or that—I begin to think you all have something to hide from me. Why are you hiding this Marrobio?

ROXO

Not hiding him, Madam. But it is utterly unprecedented that a Sovereign——

QUEEN

The rulers of Israel always spoke with the enemy in the gate. And didn't King Solomon judge cases himself? Am I not right, Baron?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Oh, please, I'm no authority on ancient history.

QUEEN

I only want to know why he tries to kill me.

CAZOTTI

But we know quite well, Your Majesty. He wants to rule Valdania, he and his fellow-Mussulmans.

QUEEN

On what ground?

CAZOTTI

He pretends they are the largest sect.

QUEEN

And isn't it true?

CAZOTTI

Er—in a way.

QUEEN

Then it's *not* so unreasonable.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But we Christians united—

CAZOTTI

And even if they were an absolute majority, we can't submit to a degraded population whose children are educated by slaves; to tyrants who when they did rule, seized the peasants' crops and wanted to abolish even our Latin alphabet. Have you ever been in the Moslem quarter?

QUEEN

My ladies always objected.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [*Who has lingered anxiously*]
Forgive me, Madam, but your toilette——

ROXO [*Looks at his wrist-watch*]

I implore Your Majesty—there's only a quarter of an hour to the banquet.

QUEEN

Then why waste time?

CAZOTTI

After all, General, where's the harm?

ROXO [*At white heat*]

Because you let your speech be altered, you think——

[*Almost apoplectic*]

But military procedure is sacred!

QUEEN

Oh, very well.

CAZOTTI

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Thank you, Madam.

QUEEN [*Going L.*]

I shall not appear at the banquet.

ROXO [*Gasp*ing]

Not appear ?

QUEEN

I am only a State form. The Duchess can receive for me.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [*Upset*]

But what can I say ?

QUEEN

That I have caught your headache.

[*The DUCHESS winces, bows and retires in a rage.*]

ROXO [*Abruptly*]

Have your way, Madam.

CAZOTTI

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Thank you, General.

QUEEN.

Thank you.

ROXO

But first we'll have the guard in—and doubled.

QUEEN [*Dismayed*]

Oh, but I can't talk before others. Which is the way to the dungeon?

ROXO

Go down that slimy staircase? In that dress! I'll send for him.

QUEEN

But I must see him alone.

ROXO

See Marrobio alone! I shall resign first.

QUEEN [*In consternation*]

But why?

ROXO

I am responsible for Your Majesty's safety.

QUEEN

And allowed a grenade in my guard's pocket.

[*HE winces*]

No, I beg your pardon. But you must let me protect myself.

[*Smiles winningly.*]

RÔXO [*Mastering himself*]

You shall see him alone. But on my conditions.

QUEEN

Name them.

ROXO

That Marrobio be lashed to this pillar.

[Points R.]

That you sit on your throne and approach no nearer.

That the guards be doubled at each entrance. That

the interview last five minutes.

QUEEN

Ten.

ROXO [*Showing wrist-watch*]

Five.

QUEEN

Very well.

ROXO

And while Marrobio is being—prepared for the interview—may I suggest that Your Majesty's toilette——?

QUEEN [*Smiling*]

How practical!

[*Bewitchingly*]

No wonder you win wars.

[*roxo bows and hurries out R.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

O, Madam, may I have the honour of escorting you?

[*Pats the hangings and shouts pompously*]

Way for the Queen!

[*Exeunt E.*]

CAZOTTI [*Whistling*]

Whew ! What a vixen !

[Walks about in perturbation, surveys throne, bites his nails, then trims them nervously with a little pocket-knife]

I wonder how it feels !

[Perches uneasily on the throne and darts off at the sound of ROXO returning R. Enter ROXO with a squad of soldiers carrying ropes : amid them MARROBIO stands, smiling disdainfully, a superb type of Oriental manhood in green turban and robes, with a touch of the Prophet and something of the King. The soldiers begin to rope him to the marble pillar. CAZOTTI approaches cautiously.]

MARROBIO [*With a terrible glance*]

Ah, Cazotti, Fate entwines our paths again.

CAZOTTI [*Shrinking back*]

Why haven't you handcuffed him ?

MARROBIO

Handcuff me !

ROXO

Rebel as he is, he is a soldier—and of the blood !

CAZOTTI

But he is serpent and tiger in one—have a care !

ROXO

Don't be alarmed. His day is done

MARROBIO

Says the poet : Even when dry—The fish cannot die
—Unless willed from on high.

• CAZOTTI

• We shall see.

MARROBIO

If Allah willed it, so be it. The mantle of life, Cazotti, is not always the cloak of honour.

[Closing his eyes HE repeats piously]
• *La Ilaha illa Allah Muhammad rasul Allahi!*

[With a sudden bound HE has escaped from his captors, almost overwhelming CAZOTTI, and is nearly L. when, aroused by the shouts, the other set of GUARDS from L. corridor rush through the curtains and hurl themselves at him. Even so, HE is not easily overpowered, and some are about to use their scimitars.]

ROXO

No, no ! Not steel !

MARROBIO [*Ceasing to struggle as suddenly and folding his arms with a smile*]

Said I not the fish would live ?

CAZOTTI

Only that Her Majesty may gaze on you.

MARROBIO [*Turning fierce again*]

To gloat over me ? May a div prick the eyes from her unveiled visage !

[HE stands passive now, with smouldering eyes,

while they drag him back to the pillar and lash him afresh. ROXO bends to look at the cords]

Back, magician, would you breathe on the knots ?

ROXO

Fudge ! I'm only inspecting them. One, two, three four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. The devil himself could not get out of that.

MARROBIO

The Prophet was tied with eleven knots, yet he had but to recite the last eleven verses of the Kur'an.

ROXO

Recite away ! To your stations !

[SOLDIERS exeunt both ways. To CAZOTTI]

Would you mind receiving Her Majesty ? The poor wounded are asking for me.

CAZOTTI

There are wounded ?

ROXO

Four, including the Corporal.

MARROBIO

Ha ! Allah is just.

CAZOTTI

I thought the Corporal was dead.

ROXO

He may yet live.

[Hastens out R.]

MARROBIO [*Uplifted*]

It is an oracle !

[*HE raises his eyes heavenwards, and commences murmuring his prayer*]

I put my trust in the God of the daybreak,
To deliver me from the evils which He hath created,
From the mischief of the moon when she is covered
with darkness,

From the malevolence of those who breathe upon
knots,

And from the——

[*CAZOTTI, who has been walking up and down ponderingly, now stops suddenly at the pillar.*]

CAZOTTI [*In a hoarse whisper*]

Would you like revenge and a fighting chance ?

MARROBIO

Hell mocks the mocker.

[*Murmurs on*]

I put my trust in the God of mankind——

CAZOTTI

But listen ! If I cut your knots, will you swear never
to betray or injure me ?

MARROBIO [*Looks piercingly at him*]

Ha ! Your fingers, too, thirst for her throat.

CAZOTTI

Hush ! Swear !

MARROBIO [*Solemnly raising his eyes*]
Aksamtu Billahi!

CAZOTTI [*Sawing at first knot*]
Ah, they're tough. But it's best not to cut them quite. You can seize your moment for springing at her. And then—the balcony! You know the Palace.

MARROBIO [*With eyes heavenward*]
Allah answers the prayer of the faithful.

[*As CAZOTTI cuts*]

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . .
seven . . . eight . . . nine! Leave the knife!

CAZOTTI
No! Look above the throne!

MARROBIO
Ah, the sword of Alpastroom! Allah is great!

CAZOTTI
May He prosper your hand! . . . Ho, there! Guards!
[*They appear at both wings. MARROBIO still seems tied to his pillar*]
Keep your eye on the wretch while I inform——

GENTLEMAN USHER [*Parting hangings L.*]
Way for the Queen!

CAZOTTI
Ah,* she is here.
[*Enter QUEEN, her hair dressed for the banquet.*]

QUEEN

Ah, thank you, Cazotti. See these men are withdrawn—far—beyond eavesdropping.

• CAZOTTI

Under protest, Madam.

[*Waves GUARDS back R. and L. Goes L. himself towards QUEEN, who seats herself on throne.*]

QUEEN

You see, I fulfil the conditions !

[*CAZOTTI bows very low and exit through the hangings L. The QUEEN and MARROBIO look at each other, SHE with curiosity, and impressed, HE tense, with glittering eyes, a wild beast couched for the spring. SHE is the first to break the thrilling silence.*]

• So you are Marrobio !

MARROBIO

And you are Margherita !

QUEEN

I wished to see you.

MARROBIO

You repaid my compliment. I left my mountains to see you.

QUEEN

And to murder me.

MARROBIO

With Allah's help !

QUEEN [*Shrinks back*]
You glory in it !

MARROBIO
Even though I sup to-night in Paradise.

QUEEN
I came in the hope of saving your life. But this tone
on the brink of death——

MARROBIO
Death is as near to your throne, Margherita, as to my
pillar.

QUEEN
I know we are all in the hands of God, but remember
you are likewise in the hands of my ministers.

MARROBIO
When the cock crows, the eagle swoops. Allah can
change night to day, says the Book, and day to night.
[*Glares balefully at her, begins to wriggle at the cut
ropes*]
He can bring life from the bosom of death and death
from the bosom of life.

QUEEN
But it is you who have brought death into this Palace.
Why ? Why ?

MARROBIO
It is a *Jihād*, a holy war. Kill your foes, says the
Prophet. Bathe yourselves in their blood.

QUEEN

How horrible ! Is that the law of Islam ?

MARROBIO

And is it not the law of Roxo ? Whence comes his glory save from slaying thousands ?

QUEEN

In fair fight and with fair weapons.

MARROBIO

No fight can be fair, no weapon unfair. *Ma sha'llab !*
You to condemn Islam—you with your peace-trap !

QUEEN

My peace-trap ?

MARROBIO

Your proclamation of amnesty. My lieutenant surrendered and you butchered him.

QUEEN

It is not true !

MARROBIO

You lie ! She-dragon with the eyes of a gazelle ! It was your Coronation sacrifice to your God.

QUEEN

I swear by your God—by Allah——

MARROBIO

Astaghfir Allah ! Profane not His name ! It may be they hid their infamy, for your eyes seem wells of

truth and your eyelids flutter like the wings of a lovebird. But what of my brothers driven to baptism or the shambles—the veils torn from our women—the—— ?

QUEEN

By whom ? When ?

MARROBIO

Through the ages. Only Da Pietra knew tolerance. And him you Christians murdered.

QUEEN

But they tell me you Moslems ruled even worse—you seized our peasants' crops, you——

MARROBIO

Somebody must pay the taxes. But we did not force our faith by the sword.

QUEEN

Mahomet did.

MARROBIO

Muhammad was God's messenger. He was later than Moses or Jesus—the seal of the Prophets. But Satan is goading humanity to destroy us. The Cross spreads its giant arms over the firmament and the Crescent dwindles like a dying moon.

QUEEN

Because you misgovern ! You don't catch up with Western civilisation.

MARROBIO

Western civilisation! When the Westernmost Continent has only just caught up with our ban on the wine-cup. Western civilisation! Have you ever visited our quarter?

QUEEN

My ladies objected.

MARRÓBIO

No wonder. There you would have found no rowdy streets filled with reeling wine-skins and unveiled females, no noisy hawkers and shop-keepers, no chambers open to the public gaze, only our cobblers and coffee-stall keepers on their carpets, never a knife raised, nor a voice, save that of the muezzin calling to prayer or the school children chanting the Kur'an. Cleanness of soul and body, charity, hospitality, love of our neighbour, equal chances for the poorest . . . And we are the Gadarene swine that must be driven out of Europe! Ah, but Allah is merciful and He has set your hands in murder against one another, and the sun of civilisation that rose in the East is setting in blood in the West and must rise again in glory in its ancient quarter!

[*HE ends ecstatic, transfigured.*].

QUEEN

If what you say is true, we have both to learn from each other. In any case this feud of Cross and Crescent can have no foothold in Valdania. Does not our proverb say:

Moslem, Christian, Jew or other,
Every Valdanian is my brother?

MARROBIO

Your brother? Ha! ha! ha! But I *am* your brother.

QUEEN [*Puzzled*]

You my brother?

MARROBIO

Have they hidden that, too?

QUEEN

They have hidden something. Just now when I pressed the Duchess, she——

MARROBIO

You did not know I am King Tito's son?

QUEEN

You? My mother had a son also?

MARROBIO

Your mother? Nay, *my* mother, Zarah, peace be to her. She was kicked away like an old Turkish slipper when policy brought a Northern princess here.

QUEEN

My father was married twice?

MARROBIO

Nay, nor to two women at once, my guileless gazelle. The pleasures which Allah in His mercy has permitted the faithful are not enjoyed by the infidel—openly.

Nor could my mother, peace to her, consent to marry a Nazarene. I am merely King Tito's eldest-born. . . . Ah, you start back. But the name wherewith you Christians brand innocent offspring is an infamy unknown to Islam.

QUEEN [*Slowly*]

Then—is it you who should be ruling here ?

MARROBIO

Nay, nay, if I rule here, it will be by the sword.

QUEEN •

But what need of the sword, brother ? I would gladly surrender the throne.

• MARROBIO [*Dazed*] •

Yallah ! You say ?

QUEEN

If it is yours morally. If God released me. Your shoulders are broad—it is all too terrible and tangled for a girl. I would rather make my music.

• MARROBIO •

Wallahi ! You make music, indeed. It is like the singing of bulbuls in my heart. What manner of Christian are you who talk like a Muslim ?

QUEEN•

I only talk like every other Christian.

MARROBIO

By the beard of the Prophet, I have talked with archbishops and archimandrites, patriarchs and cardinals, but never heard I talk like this. *Ya Walad!* You would resign your throne to the spawn of Tito, the rebel, the murderer awaiting the gibbet?

QUEEN

If he would repent, if he would render equal justice to Moslem and Christian?

MARROBIO

It is as if the air were full of the perfume of myrrh and rosewater. But do you imagine, O daughter of innocence, that if you yield up that throne, your fellow-Christians would set me upon it?

QUEEN

I could point out to them that your sect is the largest, and that on the principle of self-determination——

MARROBIO

Ha! ha! ha! If I did not know you were my father's daughter, I should say you were an American.

QUEEN [*Startled*]

An American?

MARROBIO

Was there not a great white prophet whose rumour reached even to my mountains? We deemed him a second Muhammad, for through him should the People

of the Book find justice. But what was the end of the matter? We are as frogs whose pond is dried up! The Sheikh-ul-Islam is dishonoured, the very capital of our faith in the hands of the *Kafirin*! Ah!

• [With renewed fierceness]

What proof have I that you, too, are not a snake whose slaver is steeped in honey?

QUEEN [Sadly]

Ah, I believe you. But you will not believe me.

• MARROBIO

Quoth Lukmān the Wise: "Learn from the blind, who believe only what they touch." If you speak truth, my sister, come and cut my cords.

QUEEN

I have nothing to cut with.

MARROBIO •

There is a sword over your head.

QUEEN [Looking up]

That old thing!

MARROBIO

It will be sharp enough.

[The QUEEN stands on the throne and manages to pull the sword out of its scabbard. SHE gets down and begins to move forward.]

QUEEN

Oh, but I can't leave my throne—I promised my ministers.

MARROBIO [*Derisively*]

Ha! ha! And you offered to leave it for me! Lukmān was wise indeed.

QUEEN

His wisdom was blind.

[*Calls towards hangings*]

Ho, there! Is there a chamberlain or squire on service?

[CAZOTTI answers the call: evidently he has been on tenterhooks.]

CAZOTTI

Can I do anything, Your Majesty? I have been so anxious.

[*Startled*]

You have drawn the sword of Alpastroom!

QUEEN

To cut Marrobio's cords.

[*Hands it to him. HE takes it dazedly.*]

CAZOTTI

I am to cut Marrobio's cords?

QUEEN

If you please.

[*The two men's eyes meet. CAZOTTI walks slowly and nervously and pretends to slash at the already cut knots.*]

MARROBIO [*Counting as before*]

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . seven . . . eight . . . nine.

[*HE throws off the ropes with a tigerish movement, and drags the sword from CAZOTTI'S hand. CAZOTTI recoils instinctively. MARROBIO slowly walks over to the QUEEN, who awaits him, smiling. As he reaches the dais, and sees she does not flinch, he prostrates himself at her feet, his head in the dust, his sword spread out on the floor*]

My Sovereign !

QUEEN

Rise, my brother !

MARROBIO [*Rising*]

This sword that cut my bonds has cut a covenant 'twixt me and you. Henceforth it shall be sacred for the defence of Your Majesty's friends, for the destruction of Your Majesty's foes.

QUEEN [*Rising from the throne*]

Give me the scabbard !

[*MARROBIO mounts the dais and easily reaches the scabbard. HE shows the QUEEN an inscription on it, and she girds the sword on him. While the two are thus absorbed at L., ROXO enters hurriedly R., holding out his wrist-watch.*]

CAZOTTI [*Who has remained R.*]

Say nothing ! Marrobio is won over !

ROXO [*Staring*]
Is it possible ?

CAZOTTI

Ay, and by giving him the command against Bosnavina, we get two of your points in one. Then with Gripstein supplying the money, and you at the War Office——

ROXO

Ah, but the fifth point ? How make Bosnavina declare war ?

CAZOTTI [*Picking up the mass of cords*]

Trust Providence to cut that knot, too.

[*Beckoning, he throws the cords to a GUARD espied R.*]

QUEEN [*To MARROBIO*]

Now you are girded.

[*Turns, perceives ROXO*]

Prince Marrobio has consented to stay for the banquet—he will, of course, have the place of honour.

ROXO

But, Madam—— !

QUEEN

Silence ! I will hear no more of your miserable objections. I have done more in five minutes to bring peace than you in five years.

[*Turns her back on him and mounts haughtily to her throne.*]

ROXO [*To CAZOTTI*]

It is intolerable. I shall resign.

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Naturally. To go to the War Office. For, fifthly and finally——

ROXO [*In a low, awestruck voice*]

You are right! She gives a bastard Mussulman the place of Prince Condrexoulok. It is the finger of God.

GENTLEMAN USHER [*Appearing R.*]

Is Your Majesty ready to receive?

QUEEN

Quite.

[*To MARROBIO, who begins to move down*]

Remain at my right hand, brother.

CURTAIN.

Act Three

[The Throne Room in the San Marco Palace as before, save that a fire of logs is burning on the great hearth and two captured Bosnavinian flags hang on the wall in place of the sword of Alpaström, and if ever the casement is opened, the mountains are seen snowy to their base. At a table drawn up near the fire the DUCHESS D'AZOLLO and various MAIDS OF HONOUR are making bandages. They are drably attired: some in mourning, and one in the Red Cross costume. At R. the old line of smart stalwart soldiers is replaced by a collection of aged or decrepit civilians in ill-fitting uniforms, under CORPORAL VANNI, now minus his right arm. For an instant the ladies work in silence, then faintly through the closed casement comes the high clear cry of the muezzin from the nearest minaret.]

MUEZZIN *[From afar]*

Allah Akbar la ila ha illa Allah . . .

[Two of the soldiers prostrate themselves.]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Fifteen o'clock by the minaret.

[Rising]

I am afraid we oughtn't to waste these candles, and we shall spoil our eyes if we work much longer.

*[As the ladies gather up their work, a church-bell
chimes three]*

Put back the table, Corporal.

VANNI [*Motioning to his men to obey*]
I have ohly one arm now, your Highness.

• DUCHESS D'AZOLLO
Ah, poor fellow. I hope it's not paining you.

VANNI
Not when I look at those captured flags and my
brother-in-law's letter.

• DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [*Eagerly*]
From the front ?

• VANNI
Yes, but I never found it till I came out of hospital
this morning.

• DUCHESS D'AZOLLO
Ah, then the news will be stale. Thank you.
[*Exit with ladies L.*]

VANNI [*Prodding the praying Mussulmans with his
foot*]

That's enough, you holy fakirs.

[*Goes and opens casement R.*]

Br-r-r ! Come along, you stinking Pacifist.

[*VITTORIO, a decrepit-looking old soldier with a
scholarly face, comes in, blowing his fingers*]

Hurry up, Abdullah, or I'll catch my death.

[*One of the Moslems goes out to replace the guard*]

You know what you have to look out for—the Rol-
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menian envoy—blue and gold uniform, white, cocked hat.

[*Closes casement*]

Atschew! Hi, there!

[*To VITTORIO, who has sneaked to warm his fingers at the fire*]

Get to your rank, you swine.

VITTORIO

I won't be called a swine.

VANNI

Silence, or I'll rip you up like one, you black-snouted son of a sow. You're a pro-Bosni, that's what you are, a beastly Bolshevik. D'you think I haven't heard of the sing-song you wrote about brotherhood? Brotherhood with Bosni butchers! Ugh! Stand at attention, you spy!

VITTORIO

I am a gentleman and I shall complain to the War Office.

VANNI

Gentleman! You're lucky to be conscripted and get decent rations, when other gentlefolk are glad of dry barley-bread. Ah, here *comes* the War Office. Complain, if you dare!

[*Enter GENERAL ROXO, R., with a portfolio under his only arm. Salute. He is not wearing his decorations and walks bent and tottering. VITTORIO steps from the ranks, hesitates. ROXO disappears L.*]

VANNI [*Mockingly*]
Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

VITTORIO
• It's only because he looks so broken.

VANNI
Broken, you beastly defeatist ! It's his arm worrying him, that's all. I'd gladly give him mine, only then he'd have two lefts and that wouldn't be right.

SOLDIERS [*In parasitic laughter*]
Ha ! ha ! ha ! Good !

VANNI
Have I made a joke ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !
[ROXO reappears L. *Laughter frozen.*]

ROXO
I nearly forgot, Corporal. Where is your look-out ?

VANNI
On the balcony, my General.

ROXO
You lie.

VANNI
No, my General !

ROXO
I beg your pardon. But how was it when I looked up from the Piazza ?
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VANNI

We were just changing the guard.

ROXO

Aha ! So you did leave the Piazza unwatched !

VANNI

Only for an instant.

ROXO

In that instant the Rolmenian envoy might have driven up. The new look-out must mount guard before the old is relieved.

VANNI

Yes, my General.

[*Exit roxo*]

Ah, he is a wonderful man. Nothing escapes him. The comrades in the hospital chaffed me about copying his arm. But *Dio*, if I could copy his brain ! *Cristo !* The way he manœuvred the Bosnis into our river marshes, while he rushed across and took Ripo—— !

VITTORIO

That was Marrobio.

VANNI

Yes, but where did the strategy come from ? *Dio*, if I could have heard 'em screaming and gurgling as they sank slowly in the sucking mud ! My brother-in-law

writes You could see hands clawing above the mud days after—

VITTORIO [*Looking ghastly*]
Don't !

VANNI

And what about *my* hand that they blew off ! Don't say that was Marrobio, too. As if our General would cripple his own soldiers. No, no—it was one of those naturalized Bosnis we so confidently gave papers to. But we've got 'em all interned now, these friends of yours, and they'll no more come out alive than out of that mud.

SOLDIERS

Ha ! ha ! ha !

VANNI [*Beaming*]

Ah, the fun when we took Ripo ! My brother-in-law with one bayonet spiked—but read it for yourself, Vittorio, rub your nose in it.

[*Forces letter on VITTORIO, who reads with growing horror*]

And the Bosni women, eh, boys ? Some of course asked for nothing better.

[*SOLDIERS laugh*]

Ah, it's a man's life, he says ! Why go back to brooch-making when you can make necklaces of Bosni—— !

[*VITTORIO falls fainting, the letter gripped in his hand*]

Hi ! What's this ? Get up, you old woman.

[*Spurns him with his foot*]

Time you got your blood-legs ! Attention ! Cover him !

[*The SOLDIERS stand in front of their fallen comrade to conceal him, and CAZOTTI enters R., with portfolio, and the same harassed look as ROXO. He has nearly crossed the scene when he turns.*]

CAZOTTI

Corporal !

VANNI

Yes, Excellency.

CAZOTTI

Should the Rolmenian envoy arrive while I am at the Privy Council——

VANNI

I am to send him to you—I understand.

CAZOTTI

No, you don't ! And don't have the impertinence to interrupt.

VANNI [*With crawling humility*]

A thousand pardons.

CAZOTTI

Her Majesty will be at the Privy Council, and she'd be disturbed to see the envoy. The moment your look-out espies him, a chamberlain must come and say a crisis demands my immediate presence.

VANNI
I understand.

CAZOTTI
Be careful you do, this time.

VANNI
I *am* careful, Excellency. I always post a new look-out before the old goes off guard.

CAZOTTI
Admirable! I shall not forget your zeal. But when the light on the balcony fails, post him at the Palace gate!

VANNI
Sicuro, Excellency.
[Exit CAZOTTI. *The men turn to examine the fallen GUARD*]

Ah, you've come to! And I suppose you'll be writing that we cut off Bosni ears. But it's only trophies to bring home to the girls, stupid! The Bosni officers, they slice off the ears of their own men to get the cowards to advance. Up with you, Vittorio, you'll want some fresh air after your faint—get back on guard, do you hear?

[*Opens casement*]
Come along, Abdullah, you're relieved.

VITTORIO
And so am I—of such society!
[*Throws letter at him.*]

VANNI

I'll court-martial you for that !

[A parasite picks up the letter and hands it to VANNI, and the two GUARDS exchange places while he is talking on]

Corpo di Bacco! There's scarcely a brat of sixteen but has got his chance of Bosni-sticking, while I'm cooped up here with the queerest collection of crocks that ever disgraced Her Majesty's uniform. And any day now Marrobio may be looting the Bosni capital. Lucky beggars ! Lucky beggars !

[Enter COLONEL THE MARQUIS FIUMA, Laggard like the others, his hair lavishly sprinkled with grey ; crape on his sword and on his arm. Salute.]

FIUMA

You know their Eminences, the Cardinal and the Patriarch ?

VANNI

Yes, my Colonel—by their holy clothes. They came an hour ago.

FIUMA

They are not to leave the Palace.

VANNI

Prisoners, my Colonel, ?

FIUMA

Oh no—

[Smiling sadly]

Detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. The War Office's order, say. They may have to sleep here.

VANNI

I will have a watchman posted all night at the Palace gate.

FIUMA

Excellent. I shall remember your zeal.

[Enter L., CAZOTTI in a raging passion, waving a newspaper.]

CAZOTTI.

Perdition, Colonel! Is this the way you censor? Look at that filthy rag smuggled into the Queen's blotter at the Council table!

FIUMA [Taking it]

The *Sera*! But this was never submitted to me!

CAZOTTI

Not submitted? Good God! Then it is Revolution! Withdraw your men, Corporal, well back!

VANNI

Yes, Excellency.

[Signals. They withdraw R.]

CAZOTTI

Read it—read it aloud—the letters dance before my eyes. Sit down.

FIUMA

I can't sit—oh, Excellency, if you knew how it racks me to think of my friends—the few not killed—freezing in Bosnavina, while I in warmth and safety—

CAZOTTI

It's not so blasted warm and it won't be so very safe once this wretched article rouses the people. Sit down. We need you, Roxo and I.

[Sits. FIUMA sits too, though he soon rises again]

Ah, I knew something was in the wind—the moment I saw coloured rags fluttering on the Moslem houses near the railway station.

FIUMA

In the wind—is it a pun ?

CAZOTTI

Good God, no ! Don't you know the Moslem superstition ? Those living near a cemetery always hang out bits of cloth. What the scoundrels mean to suggest is that the station where our soldiers entrain is a cemetery. And if they, who are so proud of their Marrobio, venture on this rebel sally—no wonder the Christians—but read, read !

FIUMA

Headline : “ Stop the War ”—“ Yesterday's Day of Intercession and Prayer for Victory celebrated in all the churches, synagogues and mosques of Val-dania—— ”

CAZOTTI

Ah, what did I tell Roxo? If you say "God help us," people know it's all up. . . . Excuse me.

FIUMA

"While it emphasised the unity of the country under its unexampled tribulations——"

CAZOTTI

Cut the cackle. Time presses.

FIUMA

Er—er—"Eight thousand men have been blinded by chips of granite blown off the mountains of Bosnavina, but still more tragic is the blinding of the whole people by the Government and the Jew-press."

CAZOTTI

Poor old Baron!

FIUMA

"As a matter of fact these first victories have been followed by overwhelming defeats. Despite three desperate attempts to take the pass—the gallantry of which does not compensate for the terrible casualties—Marrobio had to retire on Ripo. But the enemy, re-pouring through the pass, recaptured the town, and now holds us, foodless, frost-bitten and pneumonia-ridden, with our backs to the swollen river."

CAZOTTI

Abominable! There must be leakage at the War Office.

FIUMA

But if it is true—— ?

CAZOTTI

You, a censor, say that ! Truth is always dangerous, in war it is suicidal. Is that all ?

FIUMA

Not quite. "A glance at the uncleared snow in our streets will remind our readers that the period of mountain fighting is over for the year. Our utmost hope, therefore, is to escape annihilation whether at the hands of the enemy or in attempting to regain Valdania across the bridgeless flood." The Queen was right, you see. If we had built bridges——

CAZOTTI

There are so many things the Queen wanted that would have come in handy for war. More railways, for instance, and if we had had wireless apparatus, we shouldn't have been cut off from the front for two days by this snowstorm, not to mention we should know where the Romenian envoy was. But you young bloods wouldn't wait !

FIUMA [*Too broken to retort*]

It winds up : "Let us stop the war while some of our sons still survive to carry on our ancient valorous breed." "Valorous breed !" How these Pacifists contradict themselves !

CAZOTTI

It's more important that they contradict us.

FIUMA

What's to be done ?

CAZOTTI

Roxo is already ordering the arrest of the staff and the break-up of the printers' plant. And the Press Bureau is sending out a statement that the retreat was strategic, according to plan.

FIUMA

But that won't alter the facts.

CAZOTTI

Oh, yes, it will. Facts don't exist till they're believed. When the wires are repaired we may learn the game's up. But for the moment we remain unbeaten.

FIUMA

Is that all that lies between us and ruin ? Roxo was so sure Marrobio——

CAZOTTI

Even genius can't do the impossible. Marrobio's invasion of Bosnavina was premature. Roxo, when he ordered it, was counting on the two million Valdians there rising up and joining us,

FIUMA

But why haven't they, do you suppose ?

CAZOTTI

It turns out they have no grievances.

FIUMA

No grievances ? They weren't martyized !

CAZOTTI

No. In one thing this rag was right—we were misled by the Jew-press.

FIUMA

To which you—excuse my reminding you—dictated atrocities.

CAZOTTI

I had heard them in my childhood from my grandfather

FIUMA

But those false telegrams of yours stirred up reprisals against the Bosnavinians here.

CAZOTTI

Yes, they were useful in kindling "the war-spirit. But they were never meant as data for the War Office. Roxo should have checked them. But it is wonderful, the power of print. I believed them myself when I read them. Even the Baron believes his own papers.

FIUMA

Poor Baron ! How marvellously he bears up under his bereavements !

CAZOTTI [*Rising*]

Like Roxo, he trusts in God. But I say, keep your fireworks dry.

[*Going L.*]

The Palace must blaze with lights to-night and the streets too.

FIUMA

But we may be in darkness next week.

CAZOTTI

No matter. We've got to play for time. The cinemas must show our soldiers escalading the pass. Keep the bonfires burning and the rockets always ready.

[*Moving further L.*]

FIUMA

But ready for what ?

CAZOTTI [*Roguishly*]

Aha ! Go along now ; you've plenty to see to. I thought you knew my motto, " One combination after another." By the way, impress upon the telegraph people to keep the line to Rolmenia clear. It's a matter of life and death.

FIUMA

Ah, I can't help seeing your hope lies in Rolmenia. But how ? Rolmenia is Bosnavina's secret ally. But for Bosnavina being the attacker; Rolmenia would have had to join her. How, then, can she join us ?

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

Ah, that's the puzzle !

[*As FIUMA exit R., enter ROXO, L.*]

You're looking for me ?

ROXO

I didn't want to go back to the Council before discussing what to tell the Queen. She didn't really believe your contradiction.

CAZOTTI

It was meant only for the rest of the Cabinet. You can't trust them, or anyhow, their secretaries. But so far as she is concerned, this rag may make it easier for us.

ROXO

You would tell her the whole truth—in *her* state ?

CAZOTTI

The blacker she feels things the better—follow out your own combination.

ROXO

You are right, as usual.

CAZOTTI

And you were wrong, as usual, to stir up sleeping dogs with that Intercession Service.

ROXO

At such a critical moment we must go to God.

CAZOTTI

And make it more critical ?

ROXO

Prayer is a reconciliation with heaven. Not forty per cent. of our male adults go to Mass.

CAZOTTI

You forget that our leader and our largest sect are Mussulmans, and pray five times a day. But if we don't get back to the Council, we may find Her Majesty has stopped the war.

ROXO

I can't smile. It is too serious a possibility. We must get the Council over, so as to get to business.

BARON [*Outside R.*]

My poor Corporal, glad to see you back !

CAZOTTI

Ah, I want a word with the Baron. I follow you.

ROXO

But I, too, want the Chairman of the Man-Power Board.

[*Enter BARON, in deep mourning ; a broken man.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, Excellencies, was it not beautiful yesterday in the cathedral ? My slain son, my blinded Sigismondo, my wife dead of grief, the whole terrible burden was lifted from my heart. I felt the God of Valdania would not desert His people.

ROXO [*Grasping his hand*]

Amen. . . . How many more divisions can you promise Marrobio ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Not one, alas !

ROXO

You have combed to the last man ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

And the last boy. Outside indispensables the only man left under fifty-five is the Marquis Fiuma.

ROXO

For heaven's sake don't tell *him* that !

BARON GRIPSTEIN

As your Excellencies know, I have conscribed all our neutrals, though it is against the Constitution.

CAZOTTI

Yes, yes—would you please put all this, in writing for the Queen ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Startled*]

You are telling her the truth ?

CAZOTTI

It can't always be avoided. Haven't you seen *this* ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*After a hasty glance at paper*]

God of Israel ! . . . I saw great crowds with it, but I didn't dare to be seen buying it. . . . But it's not true !

CAZOTTI

That's what your papers are going to say. But it is
—every word.

• **BARON GRIPSTEIN**

Our poor Margherita ! Think of the pride and glory of the day when as Colonel of the Queen's Hussars she bade God-speed to the army—the cheers, the bells, the flowers, the songs, the flags ! How did this horrible fiasco come about ?

• **ROXO**

It's our own Valdanians, Baron, our two million Valdanians in Bosnavina, who have forgotten their patriotism, forgotten their mother tongue, forgotten the rock whence they were hewn, who even boast of being Bosnavinians.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

How horrible ! I have lain awake night after night, puzzling how to get more men, but the only thing I can think of is mercenaries. There are shoals of Italian labourers who go over to America for a season. They would be happier fighting.

• **CAZOTTI**

But the money, dear friend, the money ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

My last million is freely at your disposal. God knows I have little to live for but the glory and happiness of my country.

ROXO [*Moved*]

You shall yet witness it. Tell him, Cazotti—tell him everything !

[*Exit L.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Brightening*]

There is hope ?

CAZOTTI

Yes, but first a little private business.

[*Lowers voice*]

Have you succeeded in depositing my securities ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Yes, with a man in Amsterdam.

CAZOTTI

But is he a Jew ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Apologetically*]

I couldn't find anybody else.

CAZOTTI

I wouldn't trust anybody else.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ha ! He is even a practising Jew—a mediæval bigot !

CAZOTTI

Still better. A man who sticks to his religion won't stick to my money ! . . . No offence, Baron. Hush, here's Fiuma back. So that's understood.

[*Enter FIUMA, R.*]

FIUMA

The ~~w~~ives are just mended and the line for Rolmenia is clear, subject, of course, to delay at Belgrade. The post-offices, they say, are besieged with people demanding to wire to the front.

CAZOTTI [*Crumpling the newspaper*]

Ah, the poison works !

[*Enter R. the COUNTESS CAZOTTI, tripping it gaily in a bewitching nurse's uniform.*]

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

Ah, there you are, you men, gossiping as usual, while I'm slaving for our poor wounded. And it's the same in the streets, my car had to crawl. Ah, how tired I get every evening.

CAZOTTI

But, my dear, the Queen offered to relieve you of your duties.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

As if I would fail Her Majesty ! Ah, Baron, you don't make enough of us women. There's no Woman-Power Board, what ?

FIUMA

Because the power of women is incalculable.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI

How charming of you ! But it's just what my patients tell me. I'm the only thing, they say, that reconciles them to being out of the fighting.

FIUMA [*Exalted*]
They long to be back ?

COUNTESS CAZOTTI
They cry if I only mention the trenches !

FIUMA
That ought to be stated in the papers, eh, Baron ? It would give the country a fillip.

BARON GRIPSTEIN
I haven't much time for my papers now. But I'll see to it.

COUNTESS CAZOTTI
I *have* seen to it. I've been interviewed in them all. Don't you read them ? While you cackle, I work. "The Queen of Workers" they always put under my picture.

[*Enter ROXO excitedly L.*]
Ah, here comes another prattler. Excuse me, General, I haven't time.

[*Consequential exit L.*]

ROXO
Guard your Palace, Governor.

FIUMA
What has happened ?

ROXO
Barricade your doors first.
[*FIUMA rushes out R.*]

CAZOTTI

You've left the Council again ?

ROXO

To call out the troops and the machine guns. The printers can't be arrested—the offices are blocked by a desperate mob, largely women.

CAZOTTI

Ah, I told Saldo it was a mistake to close the schools for the sake of the fuel—the worry of the children, taken on the mothers' empty stomachs—ah, listen !

[Confused sounds from the Piazza.]

ROXO

They're only in small groups so far—they know meetings are prohibited. The Piazza is black with demagogues, each on his tub.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Is it Bolshevism at last ?

ROXO

Hardly. A few in red caps or cockades. But the wearers are aged.

CAZOTTI

It's lucky, Baron, we've no Man-Power left. What ?

[Re-enter FIUMA, R.]

FIUMA

My men had already done the barricading. There was a nasty surge towards the Palace.

ROXO

Ah, the groups coalescing. I pray God we shall not have to fire on them.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

You would fire on your own people ?

ROXO

I would fire on my own father, if duty demanded. May I suggest, Baron, you'd be more useful motoring down to your evening paper to hurry up the reassuring edition ? Interview yourself and say we have a million fresh men.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But what about my statement for Her Majesty ?

CAZOTTI

Just write simply : " We have not a single man more."
[BARON hurries off R.]

ROXO

He's a good fellow. What would Valdania do without him ?

CAZOTTI

And I haven't told him the real situation after all.

FIUMA

Nor me.

CAZOTTI

It's Roxo's combination, not mine.

ROXO

The time has come when Her Majesty must know, so why not Fiuma ?

CAZOTTI

Ha ! ha ! ha ! The General has a dry humour sometimes.

FIUMA

And a leaky humour other times. Sometimes he tells me everything, and sometimes nothing.

ROXO

It's because you're so sentimental about the Queen. We were afraid you'd put a spoke in our wheel.

FIUMA

I ? When the fate of Valdania—— !

ROXO

I told you long ago of certain Princes who came to the Coronation.

FIUMA [*Bounding*]

Ah, Prince Igmor covets Margherita !

ROXO

Prince Igmor, though the younger son, is his father's favourite and the leader of the Rolmenian forces——

CAZOTTI

Roxo had already projected disengaging Rolmenia from her alliance with Bosnavina——

ROXO

Bosnavina, sandwiched between us and Ro'menia,
would be caught in a vice——

CAZOTTI

So imagine Roxo's delight when the Prince began
making sheep's eyes at Margherita.

FIUMA

Pig's eyes, you mean. I never saw such mean little
peepers.

ROXO

The Prince is an able soldier, but I don't pretend he's
a beauty.

FIUMA

Outrageous !

CAZOTTI

We knew you'd say that. But your personal
feelings——

FIUMA

My personal feelings ? What about the Queen's ?
Do you think she'll look at the little ogre ?

CAZOTTI

It's fortunate she didn't. He was whisked back before
the Coronation Ball by a war-cable. Bosnavina was
menaced by Poland and under her treaty Roimenia
stood to join Bosnavina.

FIUMA

And now Rolmenia is to attack Bosnavina!

CAZOTTI [*Shrugging his shoulders*]

The *chassé-croisé* of the Dance of Death.

ROXO

The menace to Bosnavina petered out, but it left a million Rolmenians splendidly strung up for war.

FIUMA

And these million men are the price of Margherita!

ROXO

The salvation of Valdania.

FIUMA

How so? Marrobio will be annihilated long before Prince Igmor can mobilise.

ROXO

Prince Igmor is already mobilised and on the very frontier of Bosnavina.

FIUMA

And Bosnavina doesn't protest?

CAZOTTI [*Chuckling*]

She thinks he's coming in on *her* side.

FIUMA

Rolmenia and her Prince are a pretty pair!

CAZOTTI

Don't talk like Da Pietra. One would think 'you, too, had English blood. All's fair in love and war, and here we have both !

ROXO

It's true the Prince has no sense of honour—or he'd believe in ours, and be satisfied with the *promise* of marriage. But he actually refuses to launch his offensive against Bosnavina till the marriage ceremony is performed.

FIUMA [*Relieved*]

Then the whole scheme breaks down. Before the Prince can get here——

ROXO

Oh, he won't come here. How can he leave his army ?

FIUMA

Then how can they marry ? By miracle ?

CAZOTTI

By proxy.

FIUMA

What ?

CAZOTTI

You've not heard of marriage by proxy ? But it plays no small part in our annals.

ROXO

The Romenian envoy will represent his Prince.

FIUMA

That suffices ?

CAZOTTI

Even a letter of consent suffices . . . Don't look so dazed—it's all according to law and religion—ask the Cardinal or the Patriarch.

FIUMA

Ah, that's why I have to keep them on the premises !

CAZOTTI

Of course. Go along—you'll find them playing chess.

FIUMA

Sacrificing their Queen !

ROXO

Saving her. Shall she be Bosnavina's captive when she can become really its Duchess ?

CAZOTTI

She will be much happier married—she gets so hysterical nowadays. This fad of national mourning is a sign of it. Help us to persuade her—she has faith in you.

FIUMA

Which you ask me to abuse * She will never consent.

CAZOTTI

We think better of her patriotism.

ROXO

And of yours.

FIUMA

Marry that pig-eyed swaggerer !

CAZOTTI

The instant the ceremony is over, her proxy husband will cable a word to his Prince——

ROXO

They won't let us even know the word—they're afraid we'd trick him into launching his offensive for nothing.

CAZOTTI

They have got the whip-hand. It is useless protesting.

FIUMA [*Bitterly*]

So that's why the wires have to be kept free and the fireworks dry !

CAZOTTI

But we've got the better of them in the Commercial Treaty, if they don't doctor the clauses ; and we've certainly come off with the best slice of Bosnavina. It looks the smaller. But I found out from the Baron where the oil deposits lie: Ha ! ha ! ha !

FIUMA

So you've done well with our Margherita.

ROXO

And by her. Practically three kingdoms in her pocket.

FIUMA

Horrible! And if the Rolmenian envoy never turns up?

CAZOTTI

Ugh! Don't suggest such a thing. His car had already crossed into Bosnavina before the wires broke down.

FIUMA

Ha! ha! ha! So he cuts across the very country he is to destroy! Politics are certainly amusing.

CAZOTTI

It won't be very amusing if he's not here by to-night. Listen!

[*Dull cries of "Stop the war."* Enter CHAMBERLAIN, L., with a telegram on a salver]

Ha! At last! This will be news of him!

CHAMBERLAIN

Sent in from the Ministry by the subway, your Excellency.

[*Bows and goes.*]

CAZOTTI [*Tears envelope*]

Carento 13.5. He's already in Valdania, you see.

ROXO

Thank God !

CAZOTTI

What's this ? " Warn danger to the Palace. Country seething with horrible rumours. Hope arrive early this evening.—D'AZOLLO."

ROXO

D'Azollo ?

CAZOTTI

Damn ! The old fool will be worse than the young one.

FIUMA

Thank you.

CAZOTTI [*Fuming*]

While he was pottering around on his Canal Commission, he kept the country confident. He was a symbol of stability. Now—oh, this is the last straw !

ROXO

It's natural he should rush back to protect his idol from the mob.

CAZOTTI

If only he won't protect her from us ! Chamberlain !
[*The CHAMBERLAIN re-appears. CAZOTTI puts back the wire on the salver*]

Show this to the Duchess D'Azollo.

[*The CHAMBERLAIN bows and exit*]

We must trust to the Duchess monopolising her long-absent lord.

FIUMA

You won't prevent him from opposing the marriage.

CAZOTTI

If he succeeds, it is all over with Valdania.

ROXO [*Agitated*]

No, no

CAZOTTI

"Who draws the sword of Alpastroom——"

ROXO [*Thundering*],

Silence!

CAZOTTI •

You forget you are speaking to your chief.

ROXO

We punish doubt even in a plain citizen—in a chief it should be a capital offence. Tell the Queen, if you will, that this marriage is our only hope—that may be prudent—but do not blaspheme against God. He will yet save His people.

CAZOTTI

Oh, very well—go and get your miracle. I wash my hands of your combination.

[*Going L.*]

FIUMA

The crisis, Signori, is too grave for quarrels.

ROXO [*Joyously extending his hand*]

Ah, then you *will* work with us !

FIUMA [*Gripping it with a sob*]

It is the only chance I have had for heroism.

ROXO

Good lad ! Don't think I don't feel for the Queen—
or for you. Don't go, Cazotti, my nerves are on edge:

[*DUCHESS enters L., further stopping CAZOTTI by
holding out the telegram to him.*]

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO [*Agitatedly*]

Danger to the Palace ? What does it mean ?

CAZOTTI [*Savagely*]

That your husband's coming home !

FIUMA [*Smiling a little*]

Don't be alarmed, Aunt. It's only the people want
the war stopped. Can't you hear ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

The people ? What insolence !

[*Goes towards casement L.*]

Really the world seems topsy-turvy nowadays. The
Duke, I hear, goes to early Mass !

ROXO

There are worse revolutions than that. Your Highness
had better keep away from the balcony.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

They would never dare shoot *me* !

FIUMA

Have you never heard of the French Revolution ?

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

But we are not in France !

CAZOTTI [*Smiling*]

No—they do things better there ! Here there seems no leading spirit, no concentration. Do you note, Roxo, how spasmodic the shouting is ? Fortunately it's too cold to stand about. However, I'm glad you've come, Duchess. I want you please to help with the wedding.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

The wedding ! What wedding ?

CAZOTTI

A Court lady's. This very hour, perhaps. You ladies had best dress at once.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Is this a jest, Carlo ?

FIUMA

I wish to God it was !

CAZOTTI

We must do *something* to pacify the people. And it will cheer up the Court too to cast off mourning for the nonce.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

But who is it ? I am dying of curiosity.

CAZOTTI

Enlighten your aunt before she expires. And let her stop all the cackle in advance.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

But will the Queen be present ?

CAZOTTI

It will hardly take place without her.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

And will she permit grand toilette ?

CAZOTTI

You will take all your instructions from the Lord Chamberlain.

DUCHESS D'AZOLLO

Quick, Carlo ! I burn. Oh, I hope the Duke will be back for the wedding !

[Exit L. with FIUMA.]

CAZOTTI

Well, we've won Fiuma over. That's a great asset.

ROXO

It would be a greater asset to have the proxy safe on the premises. Why doesn't the Rolmenian rascal turn up ? I trust the look-out is on the *qui vive*. Every instant is precious.

[HE opens casement R. and steps out on balcony.]

CROWD [*From Piazza*]

Stop the war! Stop the war! Boo!

ROXO [*Returning trembling*]

Good God!

CAZOTTI

Frightened of the mob? You!

ROXO

The sentry's dead.

CAZOTTI

Dead?

ROXO

Half-frozen already. Could you give me a hand?

CAZOTTI

Can't you call somebody? . . . Sh! Here's the Queen.

[*ROXO closes the casement. CAZOTTI conceals his agitation. The QUEEN, entering L., makes no attempt to conceal hers. She is in black, but wears by Valdanian custom the crown for the Council.*]

QUEEN

I've dismissed the Council!

CAZOTTI

Oh, Madam, why?

QUEEN

I could see the sunset from the windows.

[*The two men look at each other. SHE gazes at the coloured-glass Madonna*]

Here at least the Madonna shuts it out—that great ocean of blood.

[*Falls into a chair L. and covers her face*]
Oh, Holy Mother, if you *could* blot it all out!
[*Sobs.*]

CAZOTTI [*To Roxo*]

That's what comes of having women monarchs.

ROXO

Her father gave us more trouble with his mistresses.

CAZOTTI

D——n etiquette! I can't stand here dumb.

ROXO

No, no. Let her have her cry out.

CAZOTTI

Time presses. I must tell her.

CROWD [*Dully from Piazza*]

Stop the war!

QUEEN [*Listening suddenly*]

Ah, you hear!

CAZOTTI

Only a few Bolshevists, Madam. But we can't stop the war. The deadlock at the pass ended in our defeat. This rag is only too accurate.

QUEEN

Oh, I have known it all along—all these long winter nights that I lie tossing in the dark, thinking of our heroes in the icy trenches. Ah, the divine relief when the sun comes up over the mountain-tops and spreads the blue shadow of the firs on the snow !

ROXO

That divine relief, Madam, can be found even in the dark, if one seeks the peace of God.

QUEEN

The peace of God ? As I lie sleepless I think of the eternal insomnia of God.

ROXO [*Shocked*]

Madam !

QUEEN

I only quote the Bible. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. Ah, it is the pain of God, not His peace, that passeth understanding. Last night, drugged by the incense and music of the Intercession Service, I felt I should sleep at last. But oh ! it was worse than my nights of insomnia ! I dreamed I was escaping from it all—drifting on a timber-raft, exulting in the rush along the river, the leaps down the roaring cataracts, the straining and snapping of the ropes. Suddenly came a strange calm. We had reached Bosnavina. But the sentries did not challenge. They stood frozen on the frontier.

CAZOTTI [*Superstitiously glancing at casement R.*]
Eh ?

QUEEN

The cattle lay frozen in the fields, the chimneys dripped with icicles. The raftsmen began building a box with their timber. I said, "What is this?" They said, "It is your coffin, Duchess of Bosnavina. Would you survive all your subjects?" While they were closing me in it, I struggled vainly to move or speak, but when I heard the frozen clods rattle on the lid, I gave a great cry and the lid flew off, and the coffin soared over lands and seas until it descended at my own doorstep in New York. I tore in, calling "Daddy, Daddy!" But they were all three frozen like the others—Daddy, Oliver, Norah. Ah, for once I was glad to wake up, to think this at least was not true.

[*Springs up*]

Tell me, tell me it is not. All through the war I have never troubled you with enquiries. But now, now——!

CAZOTTI

Calm yourself, Madam! Our American espionage department would certainly have informed us, had anything happened to the Da Pietra household. But as for the other person, if by Oliver you mean the young architect, Oliver Randel, then I can give you the most reassuring news, for he is just happily married.

QUEEN

Married?

CAZOTTI

To a California heiress who adores his architecture.

QUEEN [*Visibly stricken*]

Oh !

[*Turns away and drops into a chair. ROXO's hand grasps CAZOTTI's in congratulation of his cleverness. From L. there comes faintly a sound of a Greek Church chant in clear, boyish voices "Happy are those who fear the Lord," etc.*]

What is that ?

ROXO

Sounds like the chapel choir practising.

QUEEN

For what ? More ceremonies ? I'll have no more. Can heaven itself bring back our heroes ? Ah, I deserved that coffin !

CAZOTTI

You are overwrought, Madam. You did your best to prevent the war.

QUEEN [*Feverishly*]

Yes, I did, didn't I ? I wrote to the Ambassador, I explained.

ROXO

Never in our history has a Sovereign grovelled so !

QUEEN

But you delivered my apologies—they *were* delivered ?
[ROXO *hesitates.*]

CAZOTTI

Of course, Madam. The Bosnavinians were bent on war.

QUEEN

They were, weren't they ? It's not my fault, really ?

ROXO

They had been preparing for half a century.

QUEEN

And you all did your best, too, to prevent it—you wrote, you conferred—— !

CAZOTTI

We appealed to the League of Nations—their Committee is still sitting—we cabled to the Pope and the Caliph—we sat up all night——

QUEEN

Then why don't you stop it now ?

ROXO

Now ? When we are losing ?

QUEEN

But I asked you to stop it when Marrobio took Ripo !

ROXO

It's not in human nature to stop when you are winning.

CAZOTTI

There would have been a revolution—not so mild as to-day's.

QUEEN

But when there was a deadlock at the pass, I asked you to stop, too.

ROXO

Then we felt that with a little more pressure—

QUEEN

So whether you are winning, losing or drawing, you can never stop. The forest is smouldering and you work all night to stamp out the menace. Yet once the fire bursts out, then you are to fold your arms—or rather to pour oil on the flames!

ROXO

That is the law of war.

QUEEN

The law of lunacy! We all seem like the cat in the old Arab fable.

CAZOTTI

What cat, Madam?

QUEEN

The cat that bit the meat-knife and found such joy in the blood that she went on biting till she bled to death.

ROXO

There is no joy in blood, Madam. The joy^{is} in sacrifice. War is God's instrument for exalting and purifying a nation.

CAZOTTI [*Impatient*]

These academic arguments——

[*Enter frenziedly* BARON GRIPSTEIN, R., *dishevelled, hysteric, muddy, blood oozing from his forehead.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Save me, Madam, give me shelter !

[*Sensation*]

QUEEN [*Springing up*]

What has happened ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

The mob has burnt our quarter.

QUEEN

What quarter ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

They say the Jews made the war—I saw them driven back into the flames—women and children.

QUEEN

God in heaven !

ROXO [Roaring]
Where are the troops ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I don't know. As I passed, my car was stopped, surrounded, hooted, stoned. Yes, I remember, there were soldiers, but they joined in the jeering.

ROXO

I must 'phone to Molp.

[Enter FIUMA, L., who stares at the BARON.]

Ah, Fiama, you have heard—— ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I thank God my wife did not live to see this day, my son is blind to it.

QUEEN

Compose yourself. Fiuma, will you see to the Baron ?
He has been hurt by the mob.

FIUMA

I am sorry, Baron. Come with me.

[Is leading him out. The BARON submits dazedly.]

A raucous roar of glee is heard from the mob.]

CAZOTTI

This is getting serious. Unfortunately we haven't enough Jews to last them long.

[A red flame flickers up behind the casements]

What did I say ? The fire is spreading. The Palace——

FIUMA [*At exit*]

No danger, Excellency. They are only burning somebody in effigy.

CAZOTTI

Who is it ?

FIUMA

Oh, it's only to warm themselves.

QUEEN

Ah, you are afraid to say—it must be me !

FIUMA

No, Madam, your figure doesn't lend itself to the grotesque.

QUEEN

Who is it, then ?

FIUMA

The Prime Minister.

[*Exit L., with BARON.*]

CAZOTTI

Me ? The ungrateful brutes ! Think how they cheered my war speech from that very balcony, think of the boys of fourteen who tried to enlist ! But this peril from your own people, Madam, added to the enemy's menace, makes it imperative that without a moment's delay, Roxo and I should now explain to you——

ROXO [*Nervously*]
If Your Majesty will excuse me——
[*Bowing and going R.*]

CAZOTTI [*Angrily*]
Why do you leave it to me ?

ROXO
I must 'phone to Molp to protect the Jews. I don't
even know if the fire brigade——
[*Cries of "Margherita! Margherita!" penetrate
from the Piazza.*]

QUEEN
Ah, my people are calling me !
[*Goes to casement L.*]

ROXO [*Rushing back*]
For God's sake, Madam !

QUEEN
I faced the music when it was pleasant——
[*ROXO waves her aside and rushes out instead of
her. The red flame flickers more strongly.*]

CROWD [*From Piazza*]
Boo-oo !
Stop the war !
Death to Roxo !
Viva Roxo !
Death to Margherita !
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Down with Cazotti !
Silence for Roxo !
Boo—oo !

ROXO [*Raising his armless sleeve has obtained silence and shouts*]

Go home, my friends. The Pacifist rag has misled you ! Wait till you see the *Gazetta* ! We have a new army of a million.

[*Cheers. Voices, "Send them home," drowned in cheers*]

Victory is assured. *Viva Marrobio ! Viva Margherita ! Viva la Valdania !*

[*Closes casement amid confused cheering, mingled with some boos. All noise gradually dies down.*]

QUEEN

What is the use of feeding them with lies ?

ROXO

It only rests with Your Majesty to make my words true.

QUEEN

With me ?

ROXO

Yes, your people *are* calling you.

QUEEN

I do not understand.

ROXO

Cazotti will explain.

[*Bows and retires R.*]

CAZOTTI [*As ROXO passes*]

Coward! . . .

[*HE walks about embarrassed*]

QUEEN

I am waiting.

CAZOTTI

I—er—Just let me find a map, Your Majesty.

QUEEN

Never mind a map. Go on.

CAZOTTI

You have probably remarked that Bosnavina while bounded on the east and south-east by ourselves, has for its western neighbour, Rolmenia.

QUEEN

Is this the time for a lesson in geography?

CAZOTTI

I only wish to recall to Your Majesty the existence of Rolmenia.

QUEEN

I am not likely to forget how that pig-eyed little Prince impressed its greatness upon me, as he curled his detestable moustache.

CAZOTTI [*Disconcerted*]

Your Majesty's memory is . . . appalling. Prince Igmör is a genius.

QUEEN

So you all said of Marrobio. But never mind the Prince—he's not worth talking about—come to your point. Obviously you are thinking of getting help from his father.

CAZOTTI

Your Majesty's divination is as marvellous as your memory.

QUEEN

And your flattery as superfluous as your geography. It does not require much penetration to divine the idea of an alliance. But I refuse to drag other countries into the war, to slaughter unfortunate men who have nothing to do with our quarrel.

CAZOTTI

Then you prefer to slaughter Marrobio and his forces?

QUEEN

But if we stopped the war——!

CAZOTTI

Do you begin that again? That only means our swifter annexation to Bosnavina. Besides, the mere entry of Rolmenia into the war may stop it. Bosnavina, caught between two fires, will surrender, instead

of Valdania, and the fresh slaughter you fear will probably never take place. Ah, Madam, you have not the right to destroy your country.

QUEEN.

I am destroying it?—I?

CAZOTTI

You drew the sword of Alpastroom—will you write *our* or Bosnavina's doom?

QUEEN [*Struggling with herself—after a pause*]
What does Rolmenia ask?

CAZOTTI

The conditions are hard.

QUEEN

But since we have no alternative——

CAZOTTI

Cannot your Majesty guess?

QUEEN

My brain is too tired. Don't waste time.

CAZOTTI

They ask various things. Prince Igmor, who is really an excellent fellow, was satisfied with one thing. But his father wanted not only a commercial treaty, but the lion's share of Bosnavina.

QUEEN

A share of what does not belong to us ! Let them have it all. And for that they will give us a million men ? Oh, why didn't you tell me before ? My poor Marrobio !

CAZOTTI

Yes, Madam. But—but there is one last condition.

QUEEN

And that is—— !

[BARON GRIPSTEIN *appears* L., *spruced up again, his cut neatly plastered*]

Ah, Baron, you are restored ?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

To my senses, Madam. I am so ashamed. I don't know what I said except it was not "God bless you." May He reward you for your gracious kindness ! And it is the Countess, Excellency, that has dressed my wound. And the Cardinal and the Patriarch have been so sympathetic.

QUEEN

The Cardinal and the Patriarch ? They are both in the Palace ?

CAZOTTI

I sent for them, Madam. They . . . are interested in the Rolmenian agreement.

QUEEN

Ah, those religious minority questions !

CAZOTTI

Your Majesty would enormously oblige me by resuming your seat in the Council Chamber and letting their Eminences come to you. It is really their department—that last condition you were asking about. And I have to cope with this revolution.

QUEEN

But can't I leave the clause to them?

CAZOTTI

They rather make a point of your assent. Baron, will you not escort Her Majesty to the Council Chamber and send her their most reverend Eminences.

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I shall be most honoured.

[Precedes the QUEEN, L.]

Way for the Queen!

[Moves aside, lets her pass and follows.]

CAZOTTI *[Wiping his forehead]*

Ouf! Thank God for the Church!

[Turning R. he sees CORPORAL VANNI enter with some men and a stretcher]

What the devil——?

VANNI

General's orders, Excellency.

CAZOTTI

Eh?—Ah, that poor sentinel!

VANNI

Yes, we all liked him. Heart-failure. He flopped just here.

CAZOTTI

But, then, *Corpo di Dio*, there's no look-out !

VANNI

The General's posted one in Da Pietra Street. The Piazza is impassable.

CAZOTTI

Ah !

VANNI

Apart from the Palace being barricaded. He's to bring the envoy by the War Office subway.

[*ROXO enters breathlessly R.*]

ROXO

He's come !

CAZOTTI

The proxy ? Thank God ! Where is he ?

ROXO

Getting out of his snow-sodden motor coat. Fiuma's just bringing him.

[*Roaring as he perceives the stretcher moving to balcony*]

Don't do that now !

VANNI [*Passing on the roar to his men*]
Cabbage-heads! You must wait your chance!
[*Motions them out and exit, R.*]

ROXO
It's a handsome proxy.

CAZOTTI
These Rolmenians are as handsome as they are tricky.

ROXO
Pity the Prince hasn't got his looks.

CAZOTTI
The Prince is a mongrel—his mother was a Bosnavinian—he seems to have picked out the worst points of both breeds.

ROXO
Ha! ha! ha!

CAZOTTI
But of the two give me the Bosnavinians. The Rolmepians are a rotten, priest-ridden lot.

ROXO
What can you expect of the Greek Church? . . . I beg your pardon.

CAZOTTI
What for? Do I believe in any church?
[*A gold-laced official enters L. with champagne and four glasses*]
Ah, we are to drink!

CROWD [*A dull roar from the Piazza*]
Death to Margherita !

ROXO

Here they are.

[*Enter L., FIUMA and CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU, a dashing young cavalry officer, in blue and gold, with marks of snow still on him. He carries a well-stuffed portfolio.*]

FIUMA

Captain Theopolou ! Our Prime Minister.

CAZOTTI [*Shaking hands*]

It gives me the greatest happiness to welcome a representative of His Renowned Majesty of Rolmenia and his gallant and chivalrous son, Prince Igmor.

[*A pop from the champagne bottle the official is opening is like an ironic note of exclamation*]

You have had a hard journey, I fear. ‘

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

It was brightened by the thought of seeing the historic capital of culture.

CAZOTTI

Your goodness overrates us, but, with God’s blessing, your journey will be fruitful.

[*ALL take glasses*]

We drink to Rolmenia, the illustrious fatherland of antique faith and heroism, whose crystal-pure soul still engenders delicacy and chivalry.

[*THEY drink, but FIUMA merely sips.*]

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

You are too good. I raise my glass to the happiness of your beautiful and gifted Queen.

• [FIUMA's glass smashes.]

• CAZOTTI [*Covering up the situation*]

You will want to rest before the ceremony.

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

And you to examine and sign these.

• • [Pröffers portfolio.]

• FIUMA [*Murmuring*]

Ah, the funeral arrangements!

ROXO [*Perturbed*]

You promised—

CAZOTTI [*Quietly to ROXO*]

Hush!

[*Aloud to FIUMA*]

After attending to our honoured guest, will you find the Baron and explain things. He may be so easily swayed—we ought to have got him on our side long ago.

• ROXO

You cannot get him on one side.

FIUMA

I will do my best. Come, Captain Theopolou!

[*Exeunt L.*]

CAZOTTI [*Reproachfully*]

Don't worry over Fiuma! His word is his bond?

[*Pulls out from portfolio documents with great
pendent red seals*]

The Commercial Treaty—The War Treaty—The Marriage Contract—The Letter of Consent—The Nomination of the Proxy. With so tricky a people, they will need study, though, of course, we could always evade the clauses. But so far——

ROXO

Would I had two hands that I might rub them together!

[*The QUEEN bursts in furiously L. The CARDINAL and the PATRIARCH at her heels in full canonicals, their vestments evidently donned for the ceremony. The CARDINAL is all in red, save for the black mantle edged with it and the falling black bands, and wears a red skull cap, holding his black hat in his hand: the PATRIARCH is more gorgeous and jewelled.*]

QUEEN

Do not follow me—my decision is final!

[*ROXO and CAZOTTI bow, disconcerted*]

Ah, Cazotti, no wonder you dared not propose your monstrous combination!

CAZOTTI [*Shufflingly resentful.*]

My combination?

ROXO

It is my combination, Madam. The only way—under God—to save Valdania!

QUEEN

Then Valdania is lost !

CAZOTTI

And your throne, too.

QUEEN

I must go down with my people.

CAZOTTI

Nothing so heroic, Madam. Your people will tear you in pieces when they learn why the million men already announced——

QUEEN

My people threaten nothing so terrible as your proposition.

ROXO

You have not the right to die when you alone can save them. When you agreed to come back with me, you knew from your mother's fate that sovereignty meant sacrifice.

QUEEN

My mother was only murdered—she was not outraged.

CAZOTTI

We cannot accept that description of royal alliances; no Princess of your house has ever chosen her husband. Several have been betrothed at birth ; and as for the

famous Jacinta, the Metropolitan Archbishop performed her marriage ceremony when she was five.

QUEEN

Loathsome !

CARDINAL

No, my daughter, in your exalted sphere, ordinary values are changed. Sovereigns must seek their happiness in duty. Yesterday Your Majesty prayed God for victory. To-day He offers you the means.

QUEEN [*Shocked*]

He offers—He—— ?

CARDINAL

Assuredly.

QUEEN

Ah, you do well to say “ He ” ! A woman-God would be more understanding.

CARDINAL

As I may neither contradict nor condone your Majesty’s heresies, I must beg leave to retire.

PATRIARCH

I associate myself with His Most Reverend Eminence.

~~SAZOTTI~~ [*Desperately*]

But surely, your Holiness, Her Majesty only refers to Our Blesséd Mary.

CARDINAL

Ah, in that case——

[BARON GRIPSTEIN appears L., and draws back.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, the Council is shifted here. I intrude.

QUEEN

No, come, Baron. I need somebody human. Do you know of this horrible suggestion?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

I have just been shocked to learn it.

QUEEN [*Relieved*]

Ha!

CAZOTTI

Then the martyrdom of your sons is to go for nothing—your blinded Sigismondo, your slaughtered——!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Bursting into tears*]

My poor children!

QUEEN

Don't! It's not fair argument.

[*Sinks into a chair.*]

CAZOTTI

Hush, Baron! Consider Her Majesty's feelings.* You have the man-power statement?

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Mastering himself*]

Ah, pardon!

[*Fumbles in pocket*]

QUEEN [*Waving it away*]

I don't want it. What you call man-power I call power of suffering. Oh, my poor tortured soldiers!

PATRIARCH

Their sufferings will be subtracted from their period of purgatory.

QUEEN

If my own Church cannot persuade me, how should yours?

PATRIARCH

By showing you that they are at one in the love of the Fatherland, that you are not alone in making sacrifices.

QUEEN

And what sacrifice does anybody else make?

PATRIARCH

Everybody makes sacrifices. Prince Igmor in accepting a Catholic wife——

QUEEN [*Bridling*]

Accepting?

PATRIARCH

Both our Churches in permitting the mixed marriage.

CARDINAL

And mine in letting the Prince's Church perform the ceremony.

PATRIARCH

And mine in permitting the children to be Catholic.

CAZOTFI

Is it necessary to go into these details? The contract——

CARDINAL

Her Majesty must clearly assent, your Excellency. The Vatican, which has given me *carte blanche* otherwise——

ROXO

And since this delicate matter has come up, may I add that in these turbulent times the sooner the dynasty is assured, the better. Not till the hundred and one guns announce the birth of a prince——

BARON GRIPSTEIN

Ah, but we must be certain marriage *minus* the bridegroom is legitimate.

CARDINAL

It is certain his absence is not among the *impedimenta diremptoria* or the——

CAZOTTI

We have been into all that ! Even this letter of consent
[*Exhibiting it*]
suffices.

CARDINAL

Yes, the *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* for the year 2——

CAZOTTI

Let us not go back.

CARDINAL

But even recently, Baron, the Sacred Congregation of
the Rota——

CAZOTTI

The Baron, I am sure——

PATRIARCH

I took the opinion of my brother the Archimandrite.
State necessity——

CAZOTTI

Knows no delay. We must to the ceremony.
[*The QUEEN, who has sat silent throughout, shoots
a startled glance at him.*]

PATRIARCH

You see, Baron, although Our Lord made matrimony
a sacrament, it did not cease to be a contract.

CARDINAL

And contracts do not need the joint presence of the
parties.

PATRIARCH

Our rôle is simply to bless the contract:

QUEEN

As you blessed the banners ! As you turned church bells into cannon !

CARDINAL

The end sanctifies the means.

CAZOTTI

We are wandering from the point. If there is any flaw in the legality, so much the better. Her Majesty would remain unbound.

QUEEN

And do you think that after the Prince had fought for us, I would creep out through a legal flaw ?

ROXO

Brava ! Coals of fire for the Prince !

CAZOTTI

Even if there is no flaw, Madam, the Prince may be killed in the war.

QUEEN

A war widow ! So, Cardinal, it's not a sacrament but a gamble !

CARDINAL

It was not I who put it so, my daughter.

QUEEN

You overlook another way out, Cazotti. *I may die during the war.*

BARON GRIPSTEIN

God forbid !

QUEEN

I thought you were a friend of mine.

[Enter FIUMA, L.]

Ah, here comes a real friend.

[Hysterically]

Fiuma, if you know about this plan, tell them it is too horrible.

[A pause. FIUMA struggles with himself.]

FIUMA *[Slowly]*

It is a martyrdom. No woman in history ever had a ghastlier or a more glorious opportunity.

QUEEN

You too !

[Covers her face.]

ROXO

You will shine in our history like a star.

CAZOTTI

Come, Madam ! The Prince at the other end of the telegraph line awaits his answer.

[The QUEEN is now ringed round with six men, like

a hunted creature at bay. She sweeps out her arms wildly.]

QUEEN

You give me no breathing space.

CAZOTTI

What breathing space has Marrobio? Very soon our soldiers may cease to breathe altogether!

ROXO

Rolmenia, outraged by our refusal, will join in destroying us.

FIUMA

Bosnavina will certainly show us no mercy.

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Sobbing*]

Our immemorial glory will be extinct.

PATRIARCH

Bosnavina will impose her own bishops.

CARDINAL

Our Moslems will rise and crush the Church.

QUEEN

And I am to be the scapegoat! Here you stand, six great men, two of you with the keys of heaven, yet you can think of no way of saving your country but by outraging a lonely girl!

CAZOTTI

I protest, Madam——!

ROXO

Your Majesty's language——!

FIUMA

I would give my life——!

[*All speaking at once.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN

But it may turn out happy——!

CARDINAL

O, my daughter——!

PATRIARCH

I am not St. Peter——!

QUEEN [*Springing magnificently to her feet like a lioness and sweeping them all away*]

No more! If I have listened thus far, it is not because of your arguments, it is because I feel blood-guilty. Not of the war—no, not of that! But when, despite all my grovelling, as Roxo calls it, Bosnavina sounded the war-trumpet, then out of the obscure depths of my being rose an answering blood-lust, a mad joy of battle. I longed to crush Bosnavina, to humble her haughty Ambassador in the dust, and with my foot on his neck, to hear his “grovelling” countrymen salute their Duchess. Ah, the flags, the cheers, the drums, the drugs that make one drunk! Prancing in an Amazonian uniform and a plumed busby as Colonel

of my Hussars, I sped the soldiers to the strains of my own music, crying "God and glory" as one urges dogs to the chase. When Marrobio took Ripo, victory shilled through my veins like a trumpet, and I hastened to the Cathedral to offer a "Te Deum." Ah, how God has punished that savage vainglory! But is my expiation not yet complete? Must I—oh, why did they kill my mother when I need her so? Leave me, leave me, all of you! I must think, I must pray!

CARDINAL

Let me pray with you, my daughter.

QUEEN [*Stamps foot*]

Leave me. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

[*Collapsing on balcony step R., sobbing.*]

CAZOTTI [*Quietly to the Church dignitaries*]

You may prepare for the ceremonial. Come, Roxo, we must study the contracts to see they don't Jew us. Baron, we shall be glad of your help. Madam, your very humble servant.

[*All bow and exeunt except FIUMA, who stands surveying the QUEEN in silent sympathy. Then HE, too, goes out. The QUEEN turns to the painted Madonna on the casement.*]

QUEEN

O Mother of Sorrows, whose face I have scarcely known from my own mother's, help me, send me a Redeemer. . . . Or at least send me a sign. What shall I answer? What shall I answer?

CROWD [*From Piazza*]
Death to Margherita !

QUEEN

Death ? Perhaps that is the answer.

[Twilight has now fallen and the flames leaping weirdly on the hearth alone illumine the scene. The

DUKE D'AZOLLO in thick motor-coat, snow-stained, perturbed, enters breathlessly R. The QUEEN turns at the sound and springs up with a great cry]

Ah, my Redeemer ! You have come to save me from them !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Yes, yes, be calm, I have come to save you from them.

QUEEN

But how did you know ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

It is in the air.

QUEEN [*Puzzled*]

In the air ?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

The terrible war-situation. I foresaw the Palace would be barricaded—lucky I knew of the subway. You must escape.

QUEEN

Escape! From the Palace?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

'Oh, my dear, I remember your mother's fate. Don't repeat it.

QUEEN

But if I escape, what happens to Valdania?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Valdania is doomed anyhow.

QUEEN

There are tears in your voice—yes, and in your eyes!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

I did not know I should feel it so bitterly. When they made me Regent, it all seemed a farcical flummery—see what you have made of the old dilettante. A thousand years of history to end in the dust!

• [*Brushes hand across eyes*]

But I can't think of my country, only of you.

QUEEN

Only of me?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

You are dearer to me than all Valdania—oh, don't shrink, it's not a love like that. With you, your body

seems in your soul. I will get the Duchess—I know of a safe retreat for you both.

[*The crowd's cry "Death to Margherita" again penetrates*]

Ah, come!

QUEEN

But these poor ignorant people who are crying out there, I am to leave them at Bosnavina's mercy?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Whether you live or die, they are at Bosnavina's mercy.

QUEEN

But if I told you it depended only on me to hurl a million fresh troops upon Bosnavina!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Oh, God! Is it possible?

[*Half sobs.*]

QUEEN

It is certain. Victory is assured. Our heroes will not have died in vain. Bosnavina will be crushed between us and—but quick! Find Cazotti or Roxo and tell them my answer is "Yes."

DUKE D'AZOLLO [*In dazed ecstasy*]

Bosnavina will be crushed?

QUEEN

Don't stand maundering—go before I change.

*[HE hurries out L., transfigured, half-sobbing.
SHE falls on her knees before the Madonna at
the easement.]*

O Holy Mother, help me up this Way of the Cross!

*[The great room is now still dimmer, the flames leap
mystically.]*

VANNI *[At right wing, staring to L.]*

All clear!

[Turns head R.]

Come along, you——!

*[Sees QUEEN and is retiring in confusion and
motioning to his men to retreat.]*

QUEEN

Don't be so frightened of me—glad to see you out of hospital.

VANNI

Thank you, Your Majesty, for all your kindness there.

QUEEN

And your sister who was worrying so over her husband?

VANNI

Oh, we've heard from him now. And I've had such a heavenly letter about our victories.

[Produces it.]

QUEEN *[Puzzled]*

Our victories?

VANNI [*Tendering it*]

Page two is the best, Your Majesty—I can't turn it.

QUEEN [*Taking it*]

Poor fellow!

[A weird pause as she reads. Suddenly she staggers and crumples the letter in her fist]

So this is what victory means! Go! Go!

VANNI [*Alarmed*]

Y-y-yes, Your Majesty.

[Hasty exit R.]

QUEEN

And Roxo said there was no joy of blood! They should have read this yesterday in the Cathedral.

[DUKE now divested of his motor-coat rushes back L.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

You have tricked me!

QUEEN

I have tricked myself. I never realised before: . . .

[Rolls the letter still smaller]

Our heroes! Our heavenly heroes!

[CAZOTTI, the BARON and FIUMA tear in.]

CAZOTTI

A million thanks, Madam!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Beaming*]

One per man.

FIUMA

You ~~will~~ live in history !

QUEEN

I have lived in blinkers . . . To be sacrificed to this—— !

[Hurls letter away.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO

You shall *not* sacrifice yourself.

CAZOTTI

Pardon me, Duke. We have the royal promise.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

It was infamous to exact it.

CAZOTTI

Ah, I knew you would try to spoil everything. Roxo is already at the War Office wiring the glad news to Marrobio, dictating the campaign. Our Queen will not play us false.

QUEEN

False—true—it is all meaningless—let these wild beasts rend each other—let them devour me and be done with it. Bring back your priests.

CAZOTTI *[Drawing a breath of relief]*

Ah ! . . . Come, Madam, they await you in the chapel.

QUEEN

In the chapel? Profane the sanctuary? Let them come here!

CAZOTTI

But, Madam——!

QUEEN

My consent is the real marriage. You heard their learned exposition.

[Imperiously]

You have our ultimatum.

[SHE walks haughtily to the throne and mounts the steps.]

BARON GRIPSTEIN *[Sotto voce]*

But this very hall was the chapel of the original monastery.

CAZOTTI

So it was! *Bravo!* And with a little sprinkling——

[Aloud, and with a deep obeisance to the QUEEN who has now seated herself on the throne]

Your Majesty's wish is law!

[Sotto voce to BARON]

By the way, wire your Jew to sell my Bosnavinian bonds before Amsterdam learns that——

[Exeunt BARON and CAZOTTI L.]

DUKE D'AZOLLO *[Aloud]*

Something must be done, Carlo!

FIUMA

Nothing can be done—now. But, if the Prince dares claim his bride——!

[*He lays his hand on his sword.*]

QUEEN

Ah, no, not that! It would be murder, trickery . . .

Oh!

[*Covers her face*]

[*From L. bursts out a joyous carol in the fresh voices of boy choristers—"Roses, roses strew and cover"—and the stir of an advancing procession becomes audible. The QUEEN starts at the first strains.*]

QUEEN

That melody!

DUKE D'AZOLLO

It is your own setting of our nuptial folk-song.

FIUMA [*Bitterly*]

Canotti's cleverness again!

[*Enter BOY CHORISTERS in white surplices, singing.*]

BOY CHORISTERS

Roses, roses strew and cover

Happy lass and happy lover.

Sun on bride is but in keeping,

Rain is jealous angels weeping.

[*Behind, and with the choir, come other priests in the gorgeous robes of the Greek Church, with tall candles*]

and swinging censers. The PATRIARCH in his jewelled vestments comes along, sprinkling from a little chalice and murmuring prayers. The CARDINAL is at his side. One of the acolytes bears two floral crowns on a tray, and another a wine-flask and a glass. Then comes the whole COURT in gala attire, the pages and maids of honour bearing great bouquets of flowers from the royal conservatories. The COUNTESS CAZOTTI carries a basket of flax and hemp seed for strewing after the ceremony. Lastly comes CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU, walking between CAZOTTI and BARON GRIPSTEIN, who, now acting as best man, carries a great fir branch, decorated with ribbon, and ending in a gilt cross tied with red silk. The QUEEN with her black dress and pale face makes a strange contrast with all this flamboyance as she sits rigid on her throne. While the procession is filing in, an official has been lighting the tall candles in the heavy old candlesticks, and another has been spreading a red silk carpet in the centre of the room. As CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU enters, he advances alone to do homage to the QUEEN ; mechanically she puts out her hand, but as he kisses it, she draws it back as if scorched. The PATRIARCH motions to CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU to take up his stand on the carpet, which he does.]

PATRIARCH

If Your Majesty would deign to descend—

QUEEN [Not moving, pointing to floral crown]

What is that ?

PATRIARCH

The bridal crown, Madam.

QUEEN

It is the heavier of the two.

[*SHE takes off her crown, then rising, places it on the throne and descends, like a sleepwalker, and stands beside CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU. The DUCHESS and BARON GRIPSTEIN stand by as if supporting the couple, and the DUCHESS adjusts over the QUEEN's head a wedding veil, glittering with gold sequins.*]

PATRIARCH [*To CAPTAIN*]

You have brought the rings ?

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU [*Producing them*]

Blessed by the Metropolitan.

PATRIARCH

Gold for the bridegroom, silver for the bride.

[*Gives the silver ring to the QUEEN*]

These you will exchange. Wherein, dear brethren and sisters, we may read an image—

CAZOTTI [*On pins and needles*]

Is this the place for the sermon, Monsignore ?

PATRIARCH

I understand your Excellency's impatience.

[*Joins the CAPTAIN'S right hand to the QUEEN'S left. SHE drops the ring. The BARON hastens to pick it up for her*]

Are you, Demetrius, surnamed Theopolou, Captain of

Rolmenian cavalry, duly empowered by oath and by letter here to hand to represent in this rite of holy matrimony your lord and commander-in-chief, His Royal Highness Prince Igmor Alexander Constantino Moravieff Parma, Duke of Moldavia, second son of His Majesty Rodolpho, King of Rolmenia, Archduke of Wallachia ?

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

I am.

PATRIARCH

And do you, Demetrius Theopolou, as his proxy and in his name, take to lawful wife our sister Margherita Cyprina Rosamonda, Queen of Valdania, Duchess of Bosnavina ?

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

I do.

PATRIARCH

And do you, Margherita Cyprina—— !

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Stop ! If this be the Greek Church service——

CAZOTTI

This interruption is unseemly—Proceed.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

You interrupted, yourself, just now !

FIUMA

Surely if there is any valid objection——

PATRIARCH

What is it, your Highness wishes to say?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

That by your Church what you are doing now can never be undone.

CARDINAL

Nor by mine.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Not so. Our Church, though it denies divorce, admits nullity. Besides, the Pope can always——

CAZOTTI

The form of service is beyond discussion.

QUEEN [*Wearily*]

Do get the ceremony over!

PATRIARCH

Do you, Margherita Cyprina Rosamonda, Queen of Valdafnia, Duchess of Bosnavina, accept Prince Igmor, as here represented by proxy——?

FIUMA

But what guarantee have we against imposture?

CAPTAIN. THEOPOLOU [*Withdrawing hand from the QUEEN's to grasp sword*]

Signor!

CAZOTTI

If these interruptions continue, Valdania is doomed.

CARDINAL

Proceed, your Beatitude.

PATRIARCH [*Rejoining their hands—the QUEEN'S falls passively, like a dead weight*]

Do you, Margherita Cyprina Rosamonda, Queen of Valdania, Duchess of Bosnavina, take as your lawful husband, as here represented by proxy——?

[*ROXO comes rushing in L., carrying the contracts and waving telegrams.*]

ROXO [*Throwing down the contracts*]

Stop the marriage! Marrobio has conquered!

[*Confusion. Joyous outcries*]

The first telegram, Your Majesty, delayed by the snow-storm, runs: "Allah is great. Following the panic of a munitions explosion in Ripo have recaptured the city and taking the pass by surprise have swooped down on Torax. Joined by thousands of Valdanians am marching on the capital.—MARROBIO."

COURTIERS

Viva Marrobio! Bravissimo! Viva Marrobio!

[*The COURTIERS clap hands and wave handkerchiefs.*]

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Heard hysterically above all the voices as he waves his fir-branch*]

I knew the God of Valdania would not desert us!

[*Breaks down, sobs.*]

COURTIERS
Sh!

ROXO [*Holding up the second wire till there is silence*]
Dated to-day. "Allah is merciful. Capital captured
at hour of the first prayer. 65,000 prisoners, 380 guns.
The two million Valdanians risen to join us. Royal
family and Government in flight. I present Bosnavina
to its Duchess, I kiss the hem of Her Majesty's robe
and will tapestry her Palace with conquered flags.—
MARROBLO."

COURTIERS

Viva Margherita! Viva the Duchess of Bosnavina!

BARON GRIPSTEIN [*Ecstatically*]

"When Rome yields up our royal seed——!"

ROXO [*Handing telegrams to FIUMA*]

Read them in the Piazza, post them up! Corporal,
let your men unbar the Palace and spread the news!

[*At a sign from VANNI, the men file out. Exit*

VANNI.]

FIUMA [*With a sob in his voice*]

My congratulations, Madam.

[*Bows and exit.*]

CAZOTTI [*In a hard tone*]

And my humble homage to the Duchess of Bosnavina.
Your Majesty will rank with Alpastroom!

COURTIERS

Bravo !

[They wave handkerchiefs.]

QUEEN

I rank with Alpastroom ?

CAZOTTI

Did you not draw his sword ?

QUEEN

God help me ! But let the man who saved the throne enjoy it. Pay Marrobio your homage henceforth—congratulate me only on my escape.

ROXO

Your Majesty is overstrung. You must rest.

QUEEN *[Tearing off her wedding veil]*

Yes, I can rest at last. Gorged by spoils and glory, with a second Alpastroom to feed her rapacious patriotism, Valdania no longer needs me.

ROXO

Valdania needs you more than ever.

QUEEN *[Fiercely]*

What more does she ask of me ? I offered her my heart to eat, my body to be foul. Beggared of all that makes life bearable, did I hold back even my one last possession, my loneliness ? You saved me from

that pit—I bless you as one raised by Christ from hell.
Through you I can breathe the air and see the stars.
Be merciful once more and let me share my loneliness
with God.

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Go into a convent ? You !

CAZOTTI

You would yield your throne to Marrobio ?

•BARON GRIPSTEIN

We Christians will never accept a Mohammedan
ruler !

CAZOTTI

Death sooner.

COURTIERS

Ay ! Sooner death !

ROXO

•You hear, Madam ? You would unchain civil war. A
murderous rivalry of pretenders !

QUEEN [*Desperately*]

Then I must be prisoned here ? All my life ?

CAZOTTI

Who prisons you ? But the moment when Marrobio
is swollen with triumph——

ROXO [*Turning on him*]

There will never be a moment, your Excellency. Her Majesty will never be false to her blood or her oath of fidelity.

[*The sound of the mob cheering outside penetrates dully. "Margherita! Margherita!"*]

Hark, Madam. Your people are calling for you!

QUEEN

That mob, mindless as the sea in its smiles and furies!

PATRIARCH

Your Majesty's God-given charge.

CARDINAL

To whose service I consecrated you.

PATRIARCH

On such a day you must rejoice together.

QUEEN

Let them rejoice alone. I will have no part in the saturnalia of the sword.

ROXO

Do not blaspheme the sword, Madam, nor the sacrifices by which God shapes the peoples.

QUEEN

By which the devil deforms them. Beasts are less savage than men under blood-lust. No, no, General, leave it to the Church to confuse the sword with the

“cross. If you would have me stay Queen to fend off war within, you must swear to me, Signori, that there shall nevermore be war without.

CAZOTTI

Our conquest of Bosnavina assures that, Madam.

QUEEN

Would it not be surer if we gave Bosnavina her freedom back, keeping only our recovered province?

DUKE D'AZOLLO

Oh, Madam.

[*Resentful murmurs from COURTIERs.*]

ROXO

Give Bosnavina freedom for revenge?

QUEEN

Reason to desist from revenge! Our grace would turn her swords into ploughshares.

ROXO

It will be safer, Your Majesty, if we turn her swords into crutches.

[*Sardonic laughter from COURTIERs.*]

QUEEN

Then you mean to treat her as she treated our province?

CAZOTTI

Are we barbarians, Madam?

BARON GRIPSTEIN

We shall give her our culture.

CAZOTTI

Peace is our one aspiration. Under Your Majesty's benign rule Bosnavina will be blest. Marrobio would lash her to madness.

QUEEN [*Sinking into a great oaken chair L.C.*]
Then I am to be chained to a crown I do not want!

ROXO

Just because you do not want it, you are the one fit person to wear it. Will not your Eminence replace it on the royal head?

[*The CARDINAL brings the crown that has been lying on the throne. As HE moves to and fro the cries and cheering of the crowd penetrate again. "Margherita! Margherita!" The QUEEN, a broken figure, in black, sits motionless.*]

QUEEN [*As HE approaches her*]

Let me be! You have crowned me already!

CARDINAL

But not for Bosnavina, Madam.

[*Applause of COURTIERS. HE adjusts the crown*]
Receive as ruler of Bosnavina the crown of glory, honour and joy—and may God crown you with all princely virtues in this life and with an everlasting crown of glory in the life which is to come through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

COURTIERS

Amen.

QUEEN

I ask only that God should crown me with Peace!

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

Then—pardon me, Madam—had we not better complete the ceremony?

ROXO

You menace, Signor?

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

You do not suppose my Prince or my King will stomach your insult! After the Treaty was signed too!

ROXO [*Contemptuously returning the contracts*]

Take your scraps of paper! . . . Your Prince is too cautious—he looks too long before he leaps.

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU [*Taking them angrily*]

He will not have to leap far. Do not forget he is on the frontier of your new possession.

QUEEN [*Springing up*]

A new slaughter? O my God!

ROXO [*To Captain Theopolou*]

The God of Valdania has not saved us from Bosnavina to abase us before Rolmenia. Beware lest we annex you, too!

[*Sinister sympathetic murmurs from the COURTIERs.*]

CAPTAIN THEOPOLOU

Do not be too sure even of Bosnavina. She will yet witness her Revenge—with our help and God's! I salute you, Madam.

[*Haughty exit R.*]

QUEEN

No! No! Call him back! Let me be bound to your peace-altar.

ROXO

Sacrifice you to a petty princeling! No, Madam. The Queen of Valdania and Bosnavina can command a higher alliance.

QUEEN

And it was for this you saved me! For a yet unholier alliance! Oh!

[*Turns away as though to hide her shame.*]

CARDINAL

Come, Madam, a *Te Deum* in the Chapel!

QUEEN [*Flaming round*]

To thank God for Victory! When Bosnavina is praying Him for Revenge! When Rølmenia hangs like a thundercloud! When only the little candle of my life stands between Valdania and the blackness of civil war! Leave me, leave me, all of you!

[*Sinks huddled into the great chair and covers her eyes. ALL look at one another in hesitation. At a*

sign from CAZOTTI the procession begins to file out L.
The CHORISTERS start their Greek Church chant.]

CHORISTERS

"Happy are those who fear the Lord," etc.

[The hymn mingles with the National Anthem which the crowd has now started outside. As the whole glittering company with its candles straggles out, the great mediæval room becomes much dimmer and the flames of the logs flicker more weirdly than ever over the blazoned casements and the stone kings. But after an instant the church bells clang out joyously, rockets and illuminations begin to be seen vaguely through the coloured glass, guzlas tinkle and bagpipes shrill, and the National Anthem changes into Margherita's war-march sung by thousands of throats. CORPORAL VANNI and his men, thinking the room empty, enter R., with their stretcher and march unconsciously to its rhythm. They disappear on balcony R. Through the casement left open, the melody comes up in fuller volume, while in the frosty air the rockets are seen rising keenly against the sombre background of the mountains. Then the wind bangs the casement to behind the stretcher-bearers and the noises dwindle.]

QUEEN [Shivering]

How cold it is!

[SHE uncovers her eyes]

Night-so soon!

[The stretcher-bearers enter, with the Pacifist's body under a white sheet and the joyous street

sounds swell and subside with the opening and closing of the casement. Awed by their burden, they march out solemnly. The QUEEN, left alone, continues her frozen stare at the empty dusk. Then her lips shape a murmur.]

QUEEN

What was it Daddy said ? . . . Queen in a cockpit !

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